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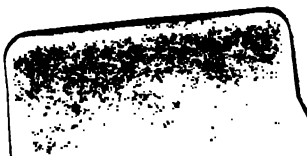
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ALVONDOWN VICARAGE.



A NOVEL.



Lane, Darling, and Co. Leadenhall-Street.



ALVONDOWN VICARAGE.

A NOVEL.

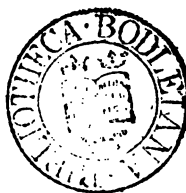
IN TWO VOLUMES.

Distress, associate of all human kind,
In calms we meet thee; meet thee in the wind.
From thy assaults no garrison can shield;
To thy domain must every mortal yield.
Thou visitst where the splendid monarch reigns,
And hauntest the cottager in lonely plains;
No breast so sacred but thy power invades,
And each frail creature thro' thy river wades.
Where from thy arm for refuge shall we fly?
To earth's cold bosom, and you friendly sky?
There no distress the body can annoy,
And there the soul exults in endless joy.

NOTES.



VOL. II.



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ALVONDOWN VICARAGE.

CHAP. I.

"In war, love mounts the warrior's steed,
In peace, he tunes the shepherd's reed,
In halls in gay attire is seen,
In hamlets dances on the green ;
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below, and saints above,
For love is heaven, and heaven is love."

SCOTT.

AS Helen and Maria were returning from a walk one evening, they met Miss Lifford and her brother. The appearance of the latter was unexpected ; Maria did not know he was in the country ; his presence, there-
VOL. II. B fore,

fore, at so critical a moment, threw her whole frame into the most tremulous state ; and to add to her confusion, she had, during their walk, made Helen her confidant on this dearest of all subjects ; and had so circumstantially related the whole progress of his attentions to her, that Helen thought it very likely she might have inspired her youthful neighbour with sentiments in her favour, more fervid than those which mere friendship could excite.

Some minutes had elapsed before Maria could recover from the confusion which his unexpected arrival had thrown her into, sufficiently to answer his enquiries. He, however, perceived not her emotion ; wholly unconscious of the impression his amiable qualities had made on her heart, its effect was unnoticed. Had he, indeed, felt a reciprocal regard, it is probable his anxious feelings would easily have made the interesting discovery ; but his heart was untouched ; he thought Maria Elton an amiable girl, and on her own account, as well

well as his sister, paid her every attention which friendship and politeness could dictate. Those civilities produced the most distressing effects on the credulous heart of Maria; ever ready to misconstrue the most common acts of civility into marks of particular attention, it is no wonder that in a friend, with whom she had for so many years lived in habits of familiar intercourse, she mistook those attentions. He had never, indeed, in the most unguarded moment, dropped a single syllable that could sanction such an idea; "but, perhaps, there may be causes," thought Maria, "that seal his lips; we are both young, and understand each other—the language of the eyes can never, surely, be mistaken."

With such flattering, though fallacious hopes, did Maria receive George Lifford, whom she had not seen for nearly ten months. He saluted her with the freedom and ease of an old friend, without hesitation kissed her cheek, and expressed quite

as much satisfaction as he felt at seeing her well.

Helen, who had just been taught to consider him an anxious lover, was rather surprised at the careless ease of his salutation and manners; she sufficiently understood the diffidence and embarrassing sensations which the appearance of a beloved object must ever excite in the palpitating bosom of a lover; to suspect that the first salutation, after so long an absence, could be paid with indifference. In Maria's manner, indeed, was all the agitation which she could so well account for; but in Mr. Liford's nothing like congenial sentiments: he was, however, a man of the world, and as she believed that all who deserved such an honourable appellation must first learn to throw off every natural feeling with as much ease as their garments, she thought it not impossible that this all-subduing passion might be subjected to the same subordination. Reconciling herself, therefore, with
this

this conclusion, she seized Miss Lifford's arm, (with whom she had been before in company) and would have hastened on, that the lovers might enjoy an exclusive conversation; but Mr. Lifford appeared by no means solicitous for such a separation; he kept by the side of Helen, till they entered a narrow path, which would admit but two; politeness then obliged him to offer his arm to Maria, who accepted it, though with all the hesitating fears that it was more an act of necessity than choice, could excite; for though she could, with such facility, misconstrue every action, and believe it dictated by real affection, when reverted to as past, yet when in his company she experienced a thousand apprehensions.

No visits had passed between the families since the return of the Eltons; Miss Lifford now, therefore, fixed an early day for receiving her friends at Hartwell Lodge.

"I know not how to account for the

sensation," said Maria, after a long fit of abstraction, which followed the departure of the Liffords, "but I certainly have always experienced a much greater degree of pain than pleasure from my first interview with George Lifford after a long separation; perhaps I expect too much, but it strikes me there is a coldness, a sort of constrained civility in his manner towards me."

She paused, with the hope of Helen's saying something to console her. She was assured of the correctness of her judgment, and could she have heard from her that one symptom of affection was visible, it would have comforted her. Helen, however, greatly as she liked to bestow pleasure, would not sacrifice her veracity to flatter the fallacious hopes of her friend, for that they were fallacious she already began to suspect; but farther observation was requisite to confirm such an opinion—she therefore continued silent.

"I thought," added Maria, determined
to

to receive some answer, "he rather shunned me this evening; can you believe his behaviour was influenced only by that diffidence which is the attendant on real love?"

"Indeed I can form no judgment," Helen replied; "his behaviour this evening was not remarkable; he saluted you with friendship, and I did not perceive any attempt to shun your society; indeed such a conjecture is absurd, since his visit was decidedly to pay his respects to Mrs. Elton and yourself."

Maria was far from satisfied with this answer; she sighed deeply, but said no more; she however continued silent the remainder of the evening. Helen sincerely sympathized in her sorrow; though she did not exactly understand the sensation of loving, without having inspired a mutual affection in the object, she could readily conceive that it must be productive of the most acute pain.

The day at length arrived on which they

were to visit Hartwell Lodge, and which Maria had anticipated, with the mingled feelings of pain and delight. The carriage was ordered early, for Mrs. Elton had some morning visits to pay in her way thither. A family on whom she proposed calling lived at a short distance from the direct road; as they drove up to the house, they saw Mr. Lifford's gig and servant at the door; it had conveyed George and his sister, whom they found in the parlour.—As it was much earlier than Miss Lifford could expect her friends, an apology was unnecessary; they however departed together, and George politely proposed exchanging his sister for Helen, who, he remarked, was a stranger to the country, and would, perhaps, be pleased at an opportunity of admiring its beauties in an open carriage. Miss Lifford warmly seconded the proposal, and as Mrs. Elton thanked him in her young friend's behalf, she was obliged to acquiesce, although, had she been allowed a choice, she would have preferred

preferred her former situation ; the idea of supporting an exclusive conversation with an entire stranger was always formidable to her ; and now, when she looked at Maria, and read in her countenance how happy she would have felt, had the proposal been made to her, her reluctance greatly increased. It was, however, impossible to express such a sentiment ; she therefore allowed Mr. Lifford to hand her into the gig. He expressed himself highly gratified at her compliance, and used every endeavour to entertain her. Helen felt grateful for his attention, and involuntarily fell into a conversation, which she supported without constraint.

The day was delightful, and the country in its highest state of verdure. Mr. Lifford spoke of a ruin, most romantically situated about two miles beyond Hartwell Lodge.—“Suppose we drive on to it,” said he, looking at his watch ; “we shall have sufficient time before dinner ; we have already gained considerably on the

B.5.

other.

other party ; and as I think you said Mrs. Elton had two or three visits to pay by the way, we may as well pass the time in lengthening our drive, particularly as I believe I can answer for the object's proving a sufficient inducement."

Helen hesitated; she proposed waiting till the arrival of her friends.—"Perhaps," said she, "your sister and Miss Elton would accompany us."

"A view of the ruin is no novelty to them," he replied; "my sister will not leave Mrs. Elton; and I believe we could scarcely find room for Maria in this vehicle."

Helen knew not what further to object, though the plan did not altogether accord with her feelings.—"Would he but make such a proposal to Maria," thought she, "how happy it would make her; and how readily would I resign the excursion, to exchange it with her."

These sensations she could not however make known; she therefore permitted him

him to proceed, without starting any further objection. The ruin, at which they soon arrived, was indeed highly picturesque; it had been a castle, but little of its original grandeur remained. A long wall, filled with the skeletons of innumerable windows, shewed the extent of the dwelling-house. Separated from it by the hand of time, was a watch-tower, and a solitary turret, to which it was still possible to ascend, by a partly-decayed staircase.

These were the most prominent parts of the building—the whole was encircled, and in a great measure supported, by ivy, the foliage of which was so thick, as almost to conceal the walls it enclosed. The building was embosomed in a deep and ancient wood; on one side it overhung a precipice, from whence the water dashed to the valley below, the rocky ascent from which, contrasted with the luxuriant trees, of many different shades, and the serpentine brook, whose sparkling surface was only partially visible, was a scene that could

not fail of inspiring delight. Helen felt it; but it was impossible to express her admiration; she allowed Mr. Lifford to lead her silently to the turret, where he seated himself by her side.

"This," said he, "is my most favourite ramble; I frequently take my station here in the evening, and sit till the queen of night appears on the Eastern hill. It is a source of pleasure to me to contrast the then softened beauties of the scenery, with the more glaring effect of broad day-light. Shall I repeat," he asked, with a smile, "the comparison I have sometimes drawn from it with respect to your sex?"

"Certainly, if you please," Helen replied.

"To the sunshine we now contemplate," said he; "I compare a woman of the world, endowed with great superiority of wit and beauty; we look on such an object with admiration, as the most finished work of creation; but the portrait is too dazzling—it repels a close inspection; we

admire only at that awful distance which prohibits familiar intercourse, and which must ever prevent a nearer approach : but in the softness of the moonlight scene, I behold an interesting female, not inferior in point of understanding or beauty, but those qualities restrained, and partly concealed, by the most captivating of all female charms, retiring diffidence. It is this attraction alone that wins the heart ; it seems to want protection, and the wish to shelter the innocent confiding bosom from the insults which unfeeling insolence is so apt to bestow, is surely the tenderest of all claims."

" You pay our sex, at least some part of it, a high compliment," replied Helen, " particularly as it is at the expence of your own. A woman of the world, you say, possessed of wit, throws you at a distance ; on what principle can you found this opinion ?—do you think her superior to you, and from that idea dread a competition ?—or do you feel it impossible to love her, because

because she is independant, and does not excite your compassion for her weakness?"

"No," he replied; "I must defend my sex, or rather my argument, from the imputation of either charge: I mean not to say that we fear the superiority of the one, nor is the passion of love founded on compassion for the weakness of the other; however, this I will grant you, that if we feel no consciousness of innate superiority in point of abilities, we like not equality in manners. There is a barrier between masculine and feminine perfections, if I may be allowed the expression, which we cannot see violated with impunity; and the dauntless, unblushing face of a woman, confident in wit, and vain in personal charms, is sure to create disgust; while in the humble mind we discover a thousand perfections, which diffidence alone withholds from our observation, and which we are therefore anxious to exhibit. I will not pretend to say, however," he added, with

with a smile, "whether vanity has any influence on this partiality; perhaps you will say it has, and that in discovering the estimable qualities, so well concealed from superficial observers, we tacitly compliment our own discernment; and as modesty pays a deference to the opinions of its associates, it may likewise, in this point of view, contribute to flatter this too prevailing weakness."

Helen was going to reply, when all her perceptive powers were attracted by the figure of a genteel-looking young man, who was wandering slowly through the ruins below: it immediately struck her as being similar to Percival Courtenay. At this suggestion she was breathless with agitation.

He had now gained the summit of the precipice, where he seated himself, and pulled from his pocket a book, in which he read a few minutes; he then closed and threw it by his side, and, with his arms folded, seemed lost in profound meditation. Mr. Lifford remarked the interest
with

with which Helen appeared to view the stranger some time in silence, then said—
“That object adds greatly to the picturesque effect of the scene.”

The sound of a voice from above induced the stranger to look up, and Helen immediately recognized the altered features of her unhappy friend; fortunately she was concealed from his view, and on perceiving Mr. Lifford, he arose and walked from the place.

Helen's countenance betrayed the agitation of her feelings.

“Are you not well?” asked her attentive companion; “allow me to assist you to the cottage below, where we may procure some assistance.”

“No, no, I am—I shall be very well immediately,” she replied; “but I think we had better return; our party will expect us.”

To this proposal, Lifford, who was really alarmed at her appearance, readily acquiesced; he silently led her to the carriage,

carriage, and proceeded towards Hartwell Lodge. Helen vainly endeavoured to collect her ideas, to support, or even attend to Mr. Lifford's conversation; her utmost efforts were ineffectual; not one moment could she abstract them from the interesting subject that so entirely engrossed her mind. Why was Courtenay there?—and how came he there alone?—It appeared as if he had been merely wandering from his present residence; but how could his residence be in that neighbourhood?—It might indeed be the choice of his wife. His wife!—how she shuddered at the term, when applied to another!

Lifford perceived the absence and perturbation of her manner, but knew not how to account for it. The transient view she had taken of the stranger did not occur to him, and he feared that some sudden disorder had seized her, which surmise her pale countenance sanctioned. To his enquiries, she however answered, that she was quite well; and as he perceived that
whatever

whatever was the cause, he was not to be made acquainted with it, he forbore to intrude on her, but hastened onwards, without attempting to interrupt the train of her reflections.

Maria was anxiously waiting their arrival; she had been vainly endeavouring to conquer the disappointment which Helen's excursion with George Lifford occasioned. Never, during her long intimacy with him, had he paid her a similar compliment; what then could this pointed attention to a perfect stranger mean?—should she find a rival in her chosen friend!—oh, such an idea was anguish inconceivable!—particularly since to that friend she had so recently unbosomed herself. To lessen her affection towards her, because she appeared amiable in the eyes of Lifford, would be ungenerous; yet, how could she love her so entirely as she now did, should this be the case? Helen could not, indeed, help inspiring favourable sentiments, but her conduct on the occasion

sion would stamp her character. Maria knew not how to forgive her consent to visit the ruined castle with Lifford alone ; but this was not an heinous offence ; it might likewise, on his part, be mere civility to a stranger, who was her particular friend.

CHAP. II.

"You see how simple and how fond I am."

SHAKESPEARE.

IN the more interesting sensations which Courtenay's unexpected appearance had occasioned, Helen lost the recollection of Maria's, at the moment she entered the drawing-room, and was introduced to old Mr. Lifford; but this selfish abstraction was not of long continuance. Maria's feelings were depicted in her countenance, at least to Helen's eyes, who had now been taught correctly to read them.—"Ah, my friend," thought she, while she retired to
a distant

a distant window, to conceal the tears that no efforts could restrain, "how joyfully would I transfer every mark of common politeness from myself to you, to perfect your happiness. Why are our destinies so perverse?—These little attentions, which to me are oppressive, would prove a balm to the heart of Marja. Can Lifford be conscious of this, and yet neglect to pay them?—No, surely he cannot be so insensible, nor can I believe Maria so weak as to have betrayed to him in the smallest instance her partiality."

Forgetting she was not alone, Helen would have pursued this train of reflections, had not George Lifford roused her from her reverie. He began to point out to her the vernal beauties that presented themselves from the window; but the sight of her tears arrested his remarks.

Shocked and surprised at the distress which seemed so suddenly to have oppressed her, he stood for a minute, apparently lost in thought, when recollecting that
whatever

whatever was the cause, he had no right to intrude on her sorrow, he again left her, but with a look of sympathy, that evinced the strongest interest in her favour. Not the most minute circumstance passed unobserved by Maria. Could Helen, in a few hours, obliterate the favourable sentiments that she believed years had ripened?—No, surely it was impossible; if he ever loved her, she had done nothing to forfeit his esteem. If he ever loved her!—oh, could there be a doubt on the subject!—she feared to investigate the cause that had led her to suppose so.

Helen had been roused from the state of abstraction into which her reflections had thrown her, by the sound of George Lifford's voice, addressed to herself; and in a few minutes she conquered her feelings sufficiently to acquire the appearance of composure. She joined the company, and endeavoured to bear a part in the conversation. Maria was less successful in her efforts to appear cheerful; and both Miss
Lifford

Lifford and her brother became, in some degree, infected with the gloom that so evidently oppressed their visitors.

Dinner was at length announced. Mr. Lifford led Mrs. Elton to the eating-room, and common politeness obliged George to offer his hand to the stranger. Maria reconciled herself to this indispensable act of civility ; but when he appeared anxious to secure a seat by her side, and to attend with more pleasure to her conversation than Maria's, she again felt her heart sink with despondency.

"I cannot be deceived," she thought ; "it is not a jealous disposition that suggests such fears, but painful conviction."

Pride now came to her aid, and convinced her, that however difficult, it was absolutely requisite to conceal her feelings, and to assume indifference ; for which purpose she talked more than usual ; but it was impossible to avoid perceiving that the effort was forced. She rejoiced when Miss Lifford

Lifford proposed leaving the eating-room, for it was a momentary respite, though but a momentary one. George, with his father, soon followed; and Maria had again the misery of seeing the former draw his chair close to Helen's, and enter into conversation with her.

After tea a walk was proposed; Maria would have excused herself from making one of the party, but it would have appeared particular; she therefore obliged herself to go. Still all George's assiduity was exerted to entertain Helen; and Miss Lifford, unconscious of her friend's sensations, requested her to wait while she fetched her gloves, and at the same time desiring her brother and Helen to proceed, took Maria's arm, and led her back to the house, from whence she was in a few minutes again ready to depart.

In vain did she attempt to engage Maria in conversation; every idea seemed absorbed; and after pursuing their companions

nions some way in profound silence, Miss Lifford exclaimed, rather abruptly—"Are you in love, Maria?"

"In love!" she repeated, with some confusion; "dear no—what can induce you to ask so strange a question?"

"Because," said Miss Lifford, "I have heard that abstraction of thought is a certain symptom of that formidable disease. Now as I have racked my brain for subjects to entertain you, and still find my efforts unsuccessful, I cannot help suspecting, that some swain, irresistibly charming, holds your heart in durance at Bath. Pray tell me if my conjectures are right, for I want to propose a few queries, being as yet a mere theorist on the subject; and as you know, my dear, the little malicious god generally aims his darts when we are least prepared to resist them, I wish to know what sort of sensations I shall experience; if I am ever so unfortunate as to be wounded."

"Indeed I am as much a novice as your-
VOL. II. c self,"

self," Maria replied ; " you must therefore propose your queries to a more experienced judge, if you wish to obtain information on the subject."

" Your looks plead very guilty to the charge, though," rejoined Miss Lifford ; " however, I do not mean to be impertinently curious. What a sweet girl is this friend of your's ! did you ever see George so captivated ?—She will really teach him to be gallant, not a very prevailing trait in his character, at present, my dear, you must acknowledge. I hinted at his partiality for the interesting stranger just now ; he declared himself invulnerable ; but notwithstanding the cold jurisprudence with which his heart is enveloped, I shall think him a philosopher, nay more, an absolute cynic, if it continues untouched."

Maria vainly attempted to answer ; twice she cleared her voice for the purpose, and fortunately for her, at this critical moment, Helen stopped, and asked some question, which rendered the conversation general.

Helen

Helen was studious to avoid another separation during the walk. Resolved not to augment the sufferings of her friend, by a voluntary action, she contrived to keep herself between Miss Lifford and Maria; George was, therefore, constrained to walk by the side of the latter; he conversed with her with his accustomed ease and friendship: but her jealous fears now misconstrued every action; she fancied he had been pointedly negligent, and even insulting to her during the day, and under this impression, to treat him with her usual good humour and cheerfulness, was impossible.

Not knowing how he had offended, for vanity never once suggested to him the truth, he ceased to intrude on her his conversation, and she, wholly unconscious of her altered manner, believed his taciturnity a further proof of his dislike and rudeness. Once, during their excursion, he offered her his arm, but believing it an act of necessity, she, with more pettishness than she was aware of, refused it.

Composed with these reflections she slept soundly. Maria's eyes, when they met in the breakfast-parlour, evinced that not so tranquilly had passed the night with her; they were swoln and enflamed; and Mrs. Elton enquired, with affectionate solicitude, what was the matter?—She complained of a severe head-ache, which she said had prevented her sleeping. Mrs. Elton insisted on her again retiring, with the hope of obtaining some repose, to which she readily assented; not indeed with the least expectation of sleeping, but seclusion was more grateful to her feelings than the society of even her dearest friends.

Maria's distress gave additional pain to Helen; though the innocent cause, she was conscious that she occasioned her misery. By what means could she soften the pang she had thus unintentionally inflicted? She likewise wished to be alone; and when Mrs. Elton, after breakfast, summoned her
servant

servant to receive some orders, she withdrew, to take a solitary ramble in the park.

She pursued the course of the river, till a seat, sweetly secluded, invited her to rest, beneath the verdant canopy that overhung the spot. Here the agonizing emotions that distressed her heart, found vent in an unrestrained flood of tears ; in this spot she believed herself safe from intrusion ; and it was a sad luxury for which her heart had long panted.—“ Why is my destiny so perverse !” she thought. “ Oh why is it my unhappy lot to strew with thorns the couches of my best friends !—Heaven only knows the gratitude and sincerity of my heart—but how shall I evince it ?—how can I restore the peace of Maria ? Fatal prepossession in favour of one insensible of the treasure bestowed on him !—Would it not prove an office of friendship to disclose to him the secret ?—Surely gratitude must excite a return for one so truly amiable.”—For a moment she hesitated,

ed, but delicacy instantly checked the suggestion.—“It is unnatural,” she immediately added, “for an avowal of affection to come from our sex, and can seldom produce happiness. So wayward is human nature, that we pursue with most avidity the object that shuns us; and the disclosure of a woman’s regard for him that has never sought it, would, I fear, rather inspire disgust than reciprocal affection; for the dignity of our sex, it is, therefore, necessary to guard most strictly this painfully interesting secret. That the misery of such a sensation must be most acute, I can easily conceive; for greatly as I now suffer, I am sensible that my wretchedness was far less supportable, whilst I believed my Courtenay inconstant. Mutual affection possesses such a charm, that anguish, in its most hideous form, is softened by its influence; even mutual sufferings produce some soothing effects on the heart; but unrequited love, oh how bitter must be the portion!—If it proves so to men, who may
avow

avow their partiality without the fear of exciting either censure or ridicule, how trebly severe must be the sentiment in a female breast, when the slightest breath that leads to the discovery subjects her to the contempt of the other sex, and the sarcastic taunts of her own !”

At that moment an object attracted her attention ; she started, and the blood rapidly mantled in her cheeks, at the figure of George Lifford, who stood attentively surveying her, and in an attitude that led her to believe he had been long a spectator to the various emotions with which she had been agitated.

Totally disconcerted at so unwished-for an intrusion, she immediately arose, and scarcely returning his salutation, walked towards the house. Utterly unable to account for this strange, though evident rudeness, he remained, for a moment, fixed to the spot ; but soon recollecting himself, he followed to seek an explanation.

“ How have I been so unfortunate as

to offend my fair friends at Lemonbrook?" asked he. "If my intrusion on you was unwelcome, Miss Coleby, believe me it was unpremeditated. I have been fishing on the banks of this river, and reached the spot where your appearance so strongly interested me, without the least expectation of seeing a human being."

"Pardon my apparent rudeness, Sir," Helen replied, while the tears that still trembled in her eyes convinced him that this was not a moment to study etiquette; "indeed your unexpected appearance surprised and confused me; I know not how I received you, but you must not impute my behaviour to design."

"It is I who have to entreat forgiveness, Miss Coleby," he replied; "believe me, the idea of adding to your distress would most severely pain me; that you are unhappy, I see with real concern; and could I be instrumental in removing the load of sorrow that so evidently oppresses you, it would afford me the most heartfelt
4 pleasure;

pleasure ; but I am a stranger—it is therefore presumption in me to touch on so delicate a subject ; nothing but accidental circumstances shou'd have induced me so to do ; can you then forgive the whole of this morning's rencounter?" added he, holding out his hand.

" Most readily," she replied, while she accepted the friendly overture. " I am grateful for the solicitude you express for me ; that I have met with trials, Mr. Lifford, which I have wanted fortitude to endure, I freely confess ; but time will, I trust, drop its oblivious curtain on the acuteness of my sufferings."

At that moment Maria Elton appeared ; she had been near them some time, but till then they did not perceive her. Helen felt confused ; she was conscious that this interview with Lifford would, to the jealous eyes of Maria, wear the appearance of design, and how could she undeceive her?—Lifford accosted her with an unusual degree of formality ; he had not quite

forgotten her pettishness the preceding evening; and in Maria's bosom the emotions of strongly awakened jealousy overpowered every other sensation; the remainder of their walk was therefore rendered unpleasant by constraint.

Lifford accompanied the ladies to the house, and bade them adieu. The corroding suspicion, that Helen's heart and tongue were at variance, pressed heavily on the mind of Maria. Helen, her chosen friend, oh how bitter, to believe that dear friend a formidable rival!—How could she act towards her?—She could neither repose in her the unbounded confidence that she had hitherto done, nor wholly conquer a coldness of manner towards her.

Helen, with grief unspeakable, read all her emotions. “Where, where shall I turn for consolation!” she exclaimed, in the anguish of her heart. “A fatality attends me wherever I go!—those that are inclined to befriend me, are prejudiced by the most conclusive, though deceitful appearances!

pearances!—I am a wretch, destined to plant thorns in the bosoms of all my kind protectors!—when will my miseries cease!”

She had retired to her apartment as soon as she returned from her walk; and in the midst of these reflections Maria entered the room. Helen's evident distress immediately found its way to the heart—she fell on her bosom, and mingled her tears with her's.

“Oh, my friend,” said she, “you too are unhappy; I know not the cause, but your misery is apparent; you whom I envy—yes, Helen, I confess my weakness: I have opened my heart to you—it is, therefore, too late to recede. The attentions you receive would render me happy—on you they are lost. I am convinced I shall never find in you an exulting rival; that you are one, (though perhaps against your own consent), is sufficiently evident.”

“Indeed, my dearest friend, you are deceived,”

deceived," Helen replied ; " whatever may be Mr. Lifford's sentiments of you, for me, be assured, he feels nothing more than compassion for sorrows which he accidentally discovered. A circumstance during our drive yesterday greatly distressed me ; he perceived the effect, though ignorant of the cause. This morning, as he was fishing, he pursued the course of the river to the spot which I had chosen from its seclusion ; he found me in tears ; and to apologize for his intrusion was his motive for following me, for his unexpected appearance surprised me so much, that I abruptly quitted the spot."

Maria attentively listened, then said—" Is this really true ?" but immediately recollecting Miss Lifford's insinuation respecting her brother's partiality, she added, with a sigh—" Do not deceive me, Helen ; the blow may be very severe, and, perhaps, I am very weak, but indeed I shall acquire fortitude to support it."

Helen continued to assure her that she
had

had not the smallest reason to believe Lifford's attentions to her proceeded from any sensation warmer than common humanity.

"You speak of sorrows which he has accidentally discovered," said Maria; "does he know what has occasioned those sorrows?—has he been honoured with your confidence?"

This question seemed a reproach to Helen's reserve.—"No, my friend," she replied, "the unhappy circumstances that will ever oppress my mind, and prevent its regaining its native cheerfulness, are too painful to be repeated to a stranger, even could my vanity suppose that stranger interested in the relation. On you, Maria, I have never obtruded the subject; that I am not happy, you perceive; but I have always considered that I had no right to wound the feelings of my friends, and for that reason alone have forborne to excite your commiseration."

"I will not solicit your confidence,
Helen,

Helen, if it gives you pain ; but believe me sincere, when I assure you, that I feel an interest in all that concerns you, which might silence every scruple."

" My dearest, best friend," said Helen, " how shall I sufficiently express the gratitude that swells my heart !—Oh, how wayward is my lot, to be thus destined to give pain, where I so ardently wish to bestow happiness !"

Maria affectionately embraced her, and soothed her with every kind assurance of continued friendship ; and Helen, as soon as she could tranquillize the emotions that Maria's unhopèd-for kindness had excited, repeated every occurrence of her past life that related to her engagement with Courtenay, and from the feeling heart of Maria received the truest sympathy.

" How different," thought Helen, as Maria left the room, " has been the conduct of this sweet girl, and Lady Elvira Musgrove !—It has been my unfortunate lot to give pain to both on similar occasions.

sions. Lady Elvira, with an understanding superior to most of her sex, and a heart warm even to enthusiasm, could forget the claims of the poor orphan, whom she once promised never to desert; and could even, by her frigid looks, and constrained civility, almost drive the unfortunate being, thus dependant on her bounty, to despondency, though she condescended not to declare the offence that had occasioned so cruel a change; while Maria Elton, with not half her understanding, or strength of mind, resists all selfish regrets, and sacrifices her fondest hopes at the shrine of friendship!—Oh, how superior is an amiable heart to the most splendid abilities!”

Helen checked herself; she had no right to draw comparisons hostile to the disposition or feelings of Lady Elvira; she too was compassionate and good; but strong passions, too often attendant on strong mental powers, had for a moment obscured

obscured her benevolence. Perhaps, ere this, she had seen her error, and repented of her unjust severity ; at any rate, she was entitled to Helen's gratitude, and it was almost a crime thus to arraign her justice.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

"Thus the dull lad, too tall for school,
With travel finishes the fool;
O'erlooks with scorn all virtuous arts,
For vice is suited to his parts."

GAY.

MARIA heroically lost the recollection of her own sorrows, in her sympathy for Helen's; but the disinterested sensation could not long speak peace to her heart, in which the keen pang of love unrequited still continued to rankle. She, however, used every effort to conceal the smart, and to appear before her mother with her accustomed serenity; her exertions were seconded

conded by Helen; but though Mrs. Elton apparently remarked not that their cheerfulness was assumed, she sufficiently felt that it was so; it was the only object that could disturb the innate tranquillity of her mind—a tranquillity that produced an habitual flow of cheerfulness, but ill imitated by her young friends. Bodily infirmities could never subdue this mild serenity, and from those of the mind she was exempted; thoroughly philanthropic, she was loved and respected by all who knew her; anxiety for her daughter's happiness was, therefore, the only circumstance that could excite pain; her clouded countenance frequently called forth the maternal tear; but when Maria strove to be gay, her mother rejoiced at the appearance, and never allowed herself to question the reality; but these bright moments occurred but seldom, and were but transiently continued.

“I know not, my dear young friends,” said she, looking affectionately at them
one

one day, when they were more than usually dispirited, "to what cause I can impute this constant depression on your spirits. Youth is the season of delight and cheerfulness, and it is distressing to me to see this dejection for ever hanging over you. It is not the impulse of impertinent curiosity that actuates my enquiries, nor do I think parents have a right to extort the secrets of their children. I do not now address you, my dear Maria, with the least wish to exercise such an authority, but I speak to you as a friend, to whom experience and lengthened years alone have given superiority of knowledge.—You, my Maria, I am well assured, have no real evil to lament; why then do you suffer imaginary distress to enervate your mind?—The disappointment of some romantically indulged hope, is, perhaps, a severe trial to the sanguine disposition of youth; but be assured, that an excess of sensibility is always accompanied by an adequate proportion of good sense and stability,

stability, if we will only exert those qualities with a firm determination to be guided by their dictates. Whenever discontent arises, and we feel disposed to repine at the trials assigned us, it is indispensibly necessary to summon our strongest resolution to combat this internal enemy; for that it is an enemy, be assured, my child. We should never forget, at such a moment, to call to our aid the recollection of all the blessings we enjoy; and can those who possess health, the affection and respect of their friends, the means of procuring, (and the still higher satisfaction of bestowing), pecuniary comforts, dare to arraign the justice of Providence, for not gratifying all their wayward wishes?—I will not believe you so culpable; this is beyond a weakness—it is disobedience to our Creator.”

Maria burst into tears, and hid her face in her mother's bosom.—“My dear, dear mother,” she exclaimed, “you are, I well know, my best—my kindest friend. I
acknow-

acknowledge the justice of your reproof: nothing but shame withholds me from opening my heart to you; but, indeed, you would despise its weakness. I will, however, profit by your advice, and endeavour to become all you wish me."

Helen, who witnessed this scene, was greatly affected. It was she, however innocently, that had caused Maria's sufferings.—"What plan," thought she, "can I pursue to restore her peace?—Were I to quit the asylum afforded me by those kind friends, what motive could I assign for so imprudent an action?—Yet to stay and render my dear Maria so unhappy, is most distressing to my heart."

Even to consult Mr. Mallett on this subject was impossible; the secret was of too delicate a nature to be divulged to the dearest and most discreet friend. Still undecided, she continued in her apartment till she was summoned to dinner. She knew the Liffords were expected, and she now found them in the drawing-room,
accom-

accompanied by Mr. Clifton, who was related to them.

On Helen's entrance he pulled out his glass, and carelessly humming a tune, surveyed her steadily through it for a minute, then said—"I think I have seen that face before; curse me if the features are not combined in too fashionable a style to be stupid English; I must have seen it during my travels. Pray, Madam, assist my memory."

"Perhaps it might not prove a very easy matter," Helen replied; "and in the present instance the success of the undertaking would scarcely recompence the exertion of your recollective powers; and at once to convince you how unworthy of your attention is the subject, I will assure you that I have never quitted my native land."

"Then I beg your pardon in behalf of my blundering memory," he replied; "but really the dull images that clogged it, before I left this country, have been so effectually

effectually rooted out by the charming sprightly ideas that colder climates have engendered, that petrify me if I am not an entire new man, as ignorant of your customs, manners, and even persons, as if I had dropped from the clouds among you."

"*Apropos* of your memory, dear cousin," said Miss Lifford. "I forgot to recount to you my dream, which I intended doing during our journey hither. It really interests you very nearly; and if Mrs. Elton does not think such a garrulous story too fatiguing, I will now endeavour to recollect the circumstances."

Mrs. Elton nodded her acquiescence; and after a yawn—"Pray let us have it, for I suppose it respects some of my foreign adventures," from Clifton, she proceeded.

"Now you must know, my good coz, that the vision of last night led me to examine the materials of which your memory is composed. I confess that its motley

contents had occupied my imagination some time before I slept, which may, in some measure, account for the strange images that possessed my mind.—Be it known then, that I travelled in the regions of fiction, till I came to a small grotesque-looking edifice, built with a few loose crumbling stones, which were continually falling. The vacancies that these accidents were making, I saw filled up with wet brown paper, which every gust of wind was sure to annihilate; thus did the exterior appear in the most miserable state of decay.—How the information reached me I know not, but by some means or other, I understood this edifice to be the external of my cousin's memory, or, as the author of the Looker-on styles it, his store-house of ideas, which awakened my strongest curiosity to view the internal apartments. I accordingly entered the portal chamber, where I found a mist so heavy, that it for some time totally obscured my perceptive powers. By degrees I, however, became
better

better fortified to endure its stupifying influence, when I discovered a few desultory ideas, (such is the appellation given to the inhabitants of these regions), floating about, and vainly attempting to acquire a knowledge of foreign languages and manners. They were, however, so extremely languid, owing, I suppose, to the oppressive mist in which they were enveloped, that they merely caught a few false impressions, which their extreme eagerness to communicate induced them to send abroad with such rapidity, that poor Common Sense, who formerly inhabited a very small part of the building, after vainly endeavouring to restrain their progress, became so wearied with her exertions, and so dispirited with ill success, that she pined to a skeleton, and has left a dreary apartment untenanted, and filled with cobwebs.—Now I saw, in my dream, that beyond this place the edifice wore a still more desolate appearance. The remnants of English walls were patched with pieces of German,

Dutch, and Russian architecture ; but so badly cemented, and so ill assorted, that the few English ideas within the enclosure appeared in manifest danger of annihilation, from the fall of the building. Why they had chosen this gloomy cavern, (for indeed, cousin, it was little better, being obscured by almost chaotic darkness), I could not conjecture, till I learnt that they were condemned to languish, the remainder of their days, in this wretched prison, by Discernment, who occasionally takes on herself the office of chastising those offenders, and had now pronounced this severe sentence, as a punishment for their querulous, though spiritless invectives against all their fraternity, inhabiting plain English store-houses. So oppressive was the influence of this terror-shedding place, that in striving to extricate myself from it, I awoke. Now pray tell me if you think my dream a correct statement of the furniture contained within this internal edifice of yours, cousin?"

Clifton,

Clifton, rather undecided whether he should resent, or treat as a jest this satirical dream, after hesitating a few minutes, at length considered that to receive it with seriousness would probably provoke a still more severe retort, and not feeling much disposed to join in a laugh at his own expence, he determined to wave the subject. Taking his glass, therefore, and viewing his cousin through it some time, with great gravity, he exclaimed—"What an immensely interesting set of features!—charmingly attractive!—formed too after the model of the bewitching Dutch oval, which gives so irresistible an expression!—upon my soul, should my good genius ever again waft me from those barbarous shores, I will prevail on my fascinating cousin to sit for her picture, to petrify my foreign friends with its beauty!"

"Oh, Heaven preserve my fascinating set of features," she replied, "from producing such frigid effects!—thank your
D 3 effort

effort at a compliment though, my good coz; but as it is my wish that this same beautiful Dutch oval countenance should produce fire instead of congealment in the hearts of its beholders, it shall never be exhibited in countries where such consolidating qualities arrest the affections."

Dinner was now announced, to the great relief of Clifton, who felt very unequal to his cousin's sarcastic attacks. He rejoiced at the recovery of his self-importance, which he was assured his knowledge of foreign cookery would sufficiently perfect. With great fluency he described the different dishes on which he had been regaled at the tables of the princes and noblemen with whom he had associated; and completely engrossed the conversation, till George Lifford, disgusted at his folly and vanity, interrupted him.

"I doubt not," said he, "notwithstanding your present contempt for your own country, but that while you were absent from it, its manners and customs were
your

your constant theme, and proved as great an impediment to your acquiring an accurate knowledge of the countries through which you passed, as the repetition of the trifles you happened to pick up during your travels, now does to your improving yourself with any information respecting your own."

"Not quite exactly so," he replied, "though I confess that no subject can prove so immensely entertaining to an Englishman abroad, as that which relates to his native country. Indeed I know not how a man can render himself infinitely engaging among foreigners, but by describing the marvellous excellencies of the land which gave him birth; nor do I understand what advantage can be derived from travelling, but that of astonishing, and half annihilating the faculties of John Bull's stupid children on our return, by an account of the wonderful scenes we have witnessed."

"Indeed," said Lifford, "Mr. Clifton's
D 4 sentiments

sentiments are too generally adopted by those young men who are sent to make the tour of the continental nations, at too immature an age to make any observations but what chance throws in their way.—Kept close at their studies till the time arrives when it is deemed expedient for them to acquire a knowledge of the world, they immerge from confinement with a travelling tutor, too often a contemptible being, rather inclined to assist their pleasures than reprove their faults. It is a period which they have long anticipated as the emancipation from slavery. They are to hold the reins in their own hands, and, as Mr. Clifton remarks, to astonish the faculties of all with whom they chance to associate, is their sole object of pursuit.—The company of foreigners is, indeed, never preferred ; if they meet with their own countrymen, they herd together, play over the same boisterous game that afforded them pleasure at the University, drive on, through every kingdom and state, full

full gallop, procure a list of the names of men of consequence, from whom they intend to boast of having received civilities, and return to their own country, finished coxcombs."

"Your remarks are cursedly severe," said Clifton; "and was I not convinced that I am totally exempted from the reflections you have thrown on young travellers, petrify me if I would not demand immediate satisfaction. I want no skill in the art of fencing," added he, starting up, and throwing himself into such attitudes, as to convince the company of the truth of his assertion.

"We do not doubt your abilities, nor your courage, Sir," said Mrs. Elton; "but in the society of females it is not yet become fashionable to exercise those ferocious talents, which custom, to the disgrace of humanity, has sanctioned in your sex."

"True, Madam," said he—"infinitely
D 5 true;

true ; and I beg ten thousand pardons for my outrage on good breeding. Curse me if I approve of the practice of butchering a fellow-creature in cold blood—it does not altogether accord with my pacific disposition. I once received a challenge in Russia, by the bye, for boasting rather too unguardedly of favours bestowed on me by a blooming young damsel, of great respectability. You can't conceive what an immensely quivering sensation I felt at my heart ; I could not persuade myself that I had any right to take the life of another ; and a little busy monitor within, called conscience, was so perpetually whispering that I had many sins to repent of before I took my departure from this world, that, petrify me if it did not stamp me a very coward, in my own estimation ; notwithstanding which, I could not conquer my repugnance, for I considered, that though it might sound infinitely honourable to kill an antagonist in a duel, it would pro-

duce a sort of feeling, that might continue ungenteelly troublesome, even after the *eclât* of the affair should be forgot."

"You have now, at least, spoken rationally," said George Lifford; "and I highly applaud your sentiments. The practice of duelling is shamefully increased of late, and I could wish a more severe law was enacted, for the punishment of the survivor. It is considered a disgrace to refuse a challenge; and the man who does so, is universally branded with the opprobrious term of coward, from whatever motive his refusal proceeds. To avoid such an appellation, he therefore rashly engages to doom either himself or his antagonist to everlasting destruction. Perhaps he plunges the dagger into the breast of his adversary, and escapes himself unhurt; he takes his trial; and on its being proved that he was not the aggressor, is honourably acquitted: but can he so easily acquit himself?—will an effort of the mind stifle the reproaches of conscience?"

D G.

—I think,

—I think, with Mr. Clifton, that this internal monitor will continue to give him pain, long after the *eclat* of the affair is forgotten. It has ever been my opinion, that the man who refuses a challenge from principle, possesses infinitely more true courage than he who accepts it, to avoid the contempt of the world. We see the most dastardly and mean-spirited wretches, urged by the influence of example, or the dread of punishment, undauntedly brave death in the field of battle; and as far from genuine fortitude is the sentiment that frequently sends the duellist to the place of appointment.—But if I proceed in this strain, Mary will say I am preaching,” he added, with a smile.

“ You have divined my thoughts correctly,” she replied; “ I was, indeed, thinking that your eloquence would grace a pulpit better than the bar; but as, perhaps, it might be rather difficult for a limb of the law to get dubbed Doctor of Divinity, I had, in idea, erected an edifice for
you,

you, with no covering but the ample canopy of heaven, where the sublimity of the scene, together with the effect of your oratory, would undoubtedly convert all who had the happiness of hearing you."

"Perhaps when I follow such an occupation," said he, with a smile, "I shall borrow my sister's metaphorical language to enforce my arguments."

Mrs. Elton now proposed retiring. In the drawing-room they were soon joined by the gentlemen. The pointed attention that Lifford paid Helen during the remainder of their stay, confirmed Maria in the opinion, that she was, indeed, the object of his affection.



CHAP. IV.

"Far in the windings of a vale,
Fast by a sheltering wood,
The safe retreat of health and peace,
A humble cottage stood."

MALLETT.

MARIA was now resolved to exert all her fortitude to conquer her unfortunate partiality; for which purpose she would have secluded herself, at least for some time, from George Lifford's society. Her resolution was, however, overruled, a very few days after she had formed it, by an invitation from Miss Lifford to her two young friends, to spend the day with her, and

and drink tea at the ruined castle, which she declared would be enchantingly pleasant at that delightful season.

The morning was fine, and Miss Lifford, accompanied by her brother, walked to Lemonbrook, to conduct her friends from thence. As they had already accepted the invitation, they were soon equipped for the walk.

"We had better pursue the foot-path," said George Lifford. "The walk through the fields will be charming; and the cottage, Maria, that you and Mary have so often admired, is now in its high state of perfection."

The whole party readily assented to this arrangement, and they proceeded through some beautifully verdant meadows.—A cottage, sweetly situated on a gentle acclivity, at length appeared. Every thing about it wore the apparent garb of neatness and industry. On one side flowed a rapid brook, whose hoarse murmurs alone broke the silence of the scene; on the
other

other was a little garden, enclosed by a thickset hedge, newly shred. It contained every vegetable that could be useful in the family of an husbandman, the growth of which not a weed appeared to interrupt.—The very white walls, and small sash windows in front, with the smooth surface of the grass-plat, that extended a few yards from the house, evinced such an air of neat simplicity, as charmed the eye of the beholder. The church-yard, which lay on somewhat elevated ground, behind the house, furnished a row of elms, sufficiently umbrageous to obscure some part of the roof.

“This spot is a perfect Elysium!” exclaimed Helen, with enthusiasm; “how comes it, Maria, that we have never wandered hither before?”

“I know not, indeed,” she replied; “chance, I believe, has alone prevented us; it is, however, a very favourite walk of mine.”

“Oh, and such a mysterious guest it
now.

now contains," said Miss Lifford, "as requires the genius of romance to describe."

"Who is he?—What sort of a being?—How came he here?—Is he young or old?" echoed from every tongue.

"You have decided that it is a being of the masculine gender, I find," she replied; "and your decision happens to be correct. I have settled him to be some prince in disguise."

"Pray satisfy our curiosity with the particulars that have induced you to form such an opinion," said her brother.

"Be patient then," said she, "and I will endeavour to recollect the story. Be it known then, that on a wintry night, when the rain beat fiercely upon the roof of this lowly cottage, and the howling wind loudly sued for entrance at every cranny in the windows and doors, came a dolorous knight, all shivering and wet, and bewildered on his way, to claim protection from the fury of the storm. Long he knocked
at

at the unrelenting door, and long the cautious dame listened unmoved to the signal of distress. One ray of pity at length warmed her heart; the heavy bolt on the inside slowly withdrew, and a shrill voice, crying—‘Who’s there?’ issued from the keyhole; then was a gentle and tremulous answer returned, couched in these words—‘A stranger, in great distress, begs shelter till the furious elements are hushed into repose.’

“At this sound the latch uplifted, and a chasm was discovered between the door and the post, into which the stranger, nothing fearing, precipitated himself. Chaotic darkness succeeded; for, woeful consequence of so much philanthropy, a gust, which rudely preceded the stranger’s entrance, condemned the quivering flame; that was held towards him as the signal of amity, to total annihilation. Vainly did the dame endeavour to repair the injury, with the contents of the tinder-box; the hard-hearted materials refused their aid, to the

the entreaties, threats, and even blows, to kindle the genial flame, so much required to cheer and reanimate the shivering stranger."

"A truce with your metaphors, Mary," exclaimed George, "and give us a plain, unvarnished account of the inhabitant of this cottage, if you wish to retain the attention of your auditors."

At that moment, for they were still opposite the cottage, the inhabitant so strangely described appeared—it was Percival Courtenay. Conscious their observation was obtrusive, the whole party now proceeded towards Hartwell. Helen had taken but a few faltering steps, when her agitation was so great, that she was compelled to solicit from Lifford the assistance she had before refused. Not aware of her disorder, he was highly gratified at being thus permitted to converse exclusively with her. His conversation was rational and pleasing, but she was not in a state of mind to

to listen to it; she, however, rejoiced that he said no more respecting the stranger.

In the afternoon arrangements were made for drinking tea at the castle, and when the sun began to decline, sufficiently for them to undertake the walk, they departed. Helen, now resolved not to be George Lifford's companion, seized his sister's arm, and said, with a smile—"If Miss Lifford is not determined always to drive me from her, I solicit to walk with her."

"Nothing but the most disinterested generosity has withheld me from claiming you before," she replied; "but, indeed, I am the kindest-hearted creature in existence, and have resigned the pleasure of your conversation, to gratify one at least equally interested."

Helen felt thoroughly disconcerted at this remark; it seemed to imply that Maria's fears were just, than which a more painful idea could not impress her mind.

At

At the castle the tea-things and seats were tastefully disposed. George had before ordered how every thing should be placed. A stone table, which stood in the midst of the ruin, and had, perhaps, once belonged to the building, was removed to the spot on which Miss Lifford had fixed to make the tea, and which commanded a view of the opposite hills and the ground below. Willows, interspersed with laburnams and lilacs, had been planted here by the Liffords, and the seats were arranged beneath the foliage, so as to produce a rural effect.

Maria and Helen expressed their high admiration of the place, and the taste with which it was ornamented. Tea was served in the same rural style ; no servant attended, and Miss Lifford deputed her brother to wait on the ladies.

“ And now,” said she, “ as tea and scandal are said to be synonymous terms, I will again begin the story, that the personage to whom it related interrupted so *mal-a-propos* this morning.”

“ Relate

"Relate your story without scandal, or we will unanimously vote for no story at all," said George Lifford, "which I know will be the greatest punishment that can be inflicted."

"On the hearers, undoubtedly," she replied; "I shall, however, make no conditions with you, but feel myself perfectly at liberty to interlard my relation with as much scandal as I please, for what is a tea-table gossip without this highly-relished seasoning?"

George, who found it vain to contend, and who allowed that her scandal was never personal, gave up the point, and she proceeded—

"In plain sense then let me tell you, if you do not pronounce the term prophaned, that love—all conquering love, has reduced this dolorous knight to his present pitiable state!—Oh, my dear George, this desolating passion commits sad ravages on the heart of man; aye, and of woman too, perhaps you may reply; but spare the
retort,

rétort, my good brother ; yours I consider an exception, and strongly fenced from the inundating storm, therefore forgive the exordium. Love then, let me repeat, and for an unworthy object, is the occasion of his melancholy."

Helen almost started from her seat ; she felt her cheeks glow with pain and vexation ; the next minute a faintness seized her whole frame, but fortunately no one observed her disorder ; and dreading to hear a continuation of Miss Lifford's story, she quitted her seat, and walked to one sufficiently distant to prevent her again suffering from the agonizing subject ; her precaution was, however, unnecessary, for at that moment the figure of Percival Courtenay, walking slowly through the underwood, presented itself ; and Miss Lifford, who declared herself of a most superstitious turn of mind, and who professed herself assured that the stranger's second critical appearance was ominous, protested

protested that the remainder of her tale should be buried in oblivion.

In vain her hearers endeavoured to combat her resolution; she steadily adhered to it; and as the tea-things were now removing, and the party discovered the departure of Helen, they walked round the building in pursuit of her.

It was long before Helen could recover from the agitation Miss Lifford's words had excited.—“ Love for an unworthy object had occasioned the stranger's melancholy.”

—Could Mrs. Ashton's barbarous insinuations have followed her so far?—The discovery that she was this unworthy object,

was all that now remained to deprive her of the affection of her present friends.—

She had scarcely persuaded herself how necessary was the appearance of unconcern, before she was joined by Lifford, who came, he said, commissioned by her other friends, to chide her mortifying preference for solitude, to their society.

She

She immediately arose, and apologizing for her rudeness, was going to accompany him to the party he had left, when Courtenay, unconscious that any human being but himself was near the ruin, had amused himself by wandering round it, and now slowly approached the spot she was about to quit. Had an apparition appeared in his way, it could scarcely have surprised him more than did the appearance of Helen.

“Is this possible !” he exclaimed.—
“Helen, do I really see you here?”

“Courtenay,” said she, giving him her hand, “I should, with equal astonishment, repeat your question, had I not seen you before, and known that this neighbourhood was your present residence.”

“Could you see me with such indifference, Helen?” he asked.

Lifford, who perceived, with astonishment, that Helen and the stranger were on terms of friendship, immediately retired.

“A lover, Helen, is it not?” asked Courtenay, in a tremulous voice.

"No, indeed," she replied.

"Forgive the agitation with which I made the enquiry," said he; "I ought, my sister, to wish for such an event, but, indeed, my heart still rebels, and the idea of seeing you happy with another, excites a degree of selfish anguish, which, though I cannot conquer, I am ashamed to possess."

"Oh, Courtenay," she replied, "how unnecessary are your fears! I must, indeed, forget that you ever existed, before I can receive the affection of another: but how came you here?—and may I ask, are you here alone?"

"I am," he replied; "and it is this solitary consolation that keeps me from Alvondown. I left that once dear spot in pursuit of health, and accident led me to this retired place; its solitude is congenial to my feelings, and perhaps it will be long before I quit it, for when I return, oh, Helen, what is to follow!"

"Solitude may sooth your sorrows,
Courtenay,

Courtenay, but it will never heal them ; believe me, it is a deceitful friend, which cheats the heart with its calm tranquillizing influence, while it strengthens the malady by its inactivity. Your disorder requires more vigorous correctives ; those you may find in the conversation of your friends. I would not wish you to mix with indiscriminate crowds ; I well know such society could only create disgust ; but you have friends, Courtenay, who are sensible and virtuous, and that air of cheerfulness which innate rectitude ever transfuses on all around, would find its way to your heart."

" Your advice is good in theory, Helen, but where can I reduce it to practice?—Not in Mrs. Ashton's circle, you will allow. Mr. Mallett, indeed, answers your description ; but even during the happiest moments I have enjoyed in his society, the recollection of the impending event, that is to unite me to a selfish insensible being, whom I must swear to love and cherish as

long as existence in this world is permitted us, has struck on my senses with electrical force, and obliged me to seek relief from that solitude, whose consolatory effects you appear to doubt."

Helen was prevented from answering by the appearance of the party, who were still leisurely making the tour of the building. Courtenay wished to retire; but Helen so anxiously entreated him to allow her to introduce him to her friends, that he at length consented. Lifford received him with the most polite attention.

Maria said in a whisper to Helen—"My dear Miss Coleby, forgive my volatility. Why did you not say he was your friend, and spare my blushes, at this detection of my erroneous account of him?—That busy loquacious informer, common report, was my author; you may therefore guess how easily a story was invented, though I scarcely dare expect your pardon for my extreme readiness to propagate it."

Helen

Helen relieved her apprehensions, by telling her that she thought the repetition of any circumstances which rumour had afforded her, respecting so apparently mysterious an individual, very natural.

The party now proceeded to Hartwell Lodge, where Miss Elton, Helen, and Courtenay, took leave of their friends, though not till the latter had received a pressing and general invitation from Liford to visit Hartwell, which Helen sincerely hoped he would accept.

Courtenay continued his walk with Maria and Helen. Why the latter had left Lady Elvira Musgrove, and how she now became an inmate with Mrs. Elton's family, he longed to be informed; but Maria's presence restrained his anxious enquiries.

When they reached Lemonbrook, he asked if she would permit him to call on her the following day?—She hesitated at this request; but when he added—"Can you not bestow one hour on your once

loved brother?—she could no longer resist his supplicating voice, but appointed the hour when she could most conveniently receive him.

A plan had now suggested itself to her mind, which she resolved to execute; it was to offer herself a visitor to Mr. Mallett, for the remaining two months that Mrs. Elton continued at Lemonbrook. Her absence, she believed, would add to Maria's happiness, and Courtenay's appearance in the neighbourhood furnished a sufficient excuse for her removal. She declared her resolution to Maria, who she requested to repeat it to her mother, with her motives for having formed it. It was a subject which Helen had never introduced to Mrs. Elton, nor had she now spirits for such a discussion. Maria knew not whether to assent to, or oppose this unexpected plan. Helen, however, represented, in such forcible language, the misery she suffered from being thus constantly exposed to the risk of meeting Courtenay, and the ill effects

effects that those interviews were so certain to produce on the minds of both, that Maria, at length, acquiesced in the prudence of her decision; and Mrs. Elton, though she lamented the loss of her young friend's society, knew not how to oppose her wishes.

CHAP. V.

“What is, unheard, the tuneful thrill?
Or what, unknown, the poet's skill?
What unadmir'd, a charming mein?
Or what the rose's blush unseen?”

SHENSTONE.

AT the appointed hour, the following day, Courtenay was announced, and Helen received him with friendly affection.— They had now a less afflictive conversation than when they met at Bath; the mutual wish to appear more happy than they felt, had in some degree the desired effect. Courtenay could now, with composure, enquire particularly into the present circumstances and situation of his friend, and

Helen,

Helen, prepared for the question, could give him such satisfactory, though evasive answers, as relieved his apprehensions for her present support. She acquainted him with her intention of visiting Mr. Mallett during his absence, of which he approved.

"You need fear no interruption to this pleasure from me, Helen," said he; "I am not anxious to revisit Alvondown; the penalty that awaits my return is too severe to be voluntarily incurred, while a plausible pretext for deferring it can be pleaded."

He enquired if she had fixed the time for her departure?—She told him she had written to Mr. Mallett, and only waited for his answer, to begin her journey. It was consoling to Helen to converse with Courtenay, without embarrassment, and free from agitation; and when he bade her adieu, though he expressed no wish to repeat the interview, she felt a degree of tranquillity that she had long been a stranger to.

Mr. Mallett's letter, as she expected, expressed the sincerest pleasure at the prospect of so soon seeing her; and as she had little to prepare, the next day was fixed on for her departure. In the evening Maria asked if she did not mean to pay a farewell visit to the Liffords?

"I will be guided by your opinion, whether such a compliment is necessary," she replied.

"Undoubtedly it is," said Maria; "their civility to you merits such a return; and if you have no objection, I will accompany you thither. Do you really think so meanly of me, as to suppose I could wish to lessen you in the estimation of those partial friends, by such a marked instance of disrespect?—Indeed, Helen, you injure me; I have been very weak, but I am learning more firmness; and do not be surprised, if, when we next meet, you behold your now pitied friend a perfect misanthrope."

"Never, my dear Maria, I am assured,"

sured," replied Helen; "you have too much sensibility ever to become so unsocial a being. In the general sense of the word, I should indeed deplore such a privation of your amiable feelings; but to see you partially so, or rather to find that you had reduced this irritable partiality, if I may be allowed the expression, to the controul of reason, would give me sincere pleasure."

"Ah, my dear," said Maria, "but when does frail mortality ever hit this happy mean? The mind sickened by disappointment, seldom quits its favourite pursuit, without abjuring the very principle that caused it, and seeking an antidote in the opposite extreme."

"Beware then, my dear Maria," Helen replied, "of the weakness that you so correctly appreciate, and rather learn to estimate the amiable qualities of your friend, unbiassed by passion or prejudice, than convert the painful affection, which he has so innocently inspired, into hatred."

"Yes, Helen, you shall find me just what you wish, when we meet again," said Maria, in a voice of agitation, that Helen feared an ill omen towards the promised reformation.

The carriage that had been ordered to convey them to Hartwell Lodge was soon ready, and they departed. Both Miss Lifford and her brother expressed the sincerest regret at the unexpected intention which Helen now expressed of quitting Lemonbrook the following day. George seemed anxious for an opportunity of speaking to her alone, but she studiously avoided such a *tête-a-tête*; and after having expressed the gratitude she felt for their civilities to her, she reminded Maria of the arrangements she had to make for her journey after her return, which she said prevented her making a longer visit.

Mrs. Elton and Maria saw the chaise, which arrived at an early hour the following morning to convey Helen from Lemonbrook, with real regret; they repeated their

their earnest entreaties to her to join them in London, with which she promised to comply ; and after receiving every flattering expression of continued regard, which the sincerity of their hearts dictated, she bade them an affectionate adieu.

She had scarcely lost sight of those kind friends, when the figure of Courtenay presented itself in the road through which she passed, evidently for the purpose of exchanging a parting benediction ; the chaise, however, continued its rapid motion, which he attempted not to interrupt.

It was late in the evening when she reached Alvondown. She felt a sickness at her heart as she passed Mrs. Ashton's house ; that dwelling contained Courtenay's destined bride. The church and vicarage-house next met her view. How painfully did those dear objects remind her of her beloved parent, and how closely connected with that retrospect was the still dear friend of her heart !

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Mr. Mallett had been expecting her some time ; he received her with his accustomed affectionate kindness.—“Welcome, my dear child,” said he ; “ whatever may have occasioned this visit, I rejoice to see you.”

She could not immediately answer his salutation, and he led her silently into the library, where she had so often, with Courtenay, received instructions from her respected parent. Mr. Mallett participated in her feelings at thus revisiting these interesting scenes, and for some time allowed her to indulge them without interruption. At length he however endeavoured to engage her attention, by entering on topics that he thought would interest her.—Grateful for the genuine sympathy he bestowed, she exerted every effort to appear cheerful. She was fatigued with her journey, and retired early.

The apartment she used to occupy had now been prepared for her reception ; here every object again recalled the recollection of past scenes. She spent a sleepless

night, and arose early; she walked to the orchard, and seated herself in the arbour at its head. The shrubs and flowers were in full bloom. How often had she, with her lamented friend, watched their opening beauties, and how painfully did the conviction that those days were gone, never to return, strike on her senses!

On the white-washed wall, at the back of the arbour, the following lines, which Courtenay wrote with a pencil, on the evening when he first declared himself her lover, still remained; and though rendered, by the hand of time, almost illegible to common observation, Helen found no difficulty in decyphering them.

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Here fondly rest, nor wing thy fleeting way;
Still on my lips imprint the sacred kiss,
Still charm my soul with love’s caliv’ning ray.

Done

Dear mutual interchange of hearts sincere,
May no rude shock of adverse fate destroy,
Secure in peace, may each revolving year,
Crown the fond hope of lasting home-felt joy !"

What a variety of emotions did the perusal of these almost forgotten lines excite ! lost in the reflections which the fond retrospect occasioned, she continued, unconscious of the progress of time, till Mr. Mallett came to tell her breakfast waited.— She immediately accompanied him to the house, and after breakfast proposed visiting all the poor neighbours, whom she had formerly known, to which Mr. Mallett assented.

Her first visit was to Agnes, who received her with unfeigned pleasure—" But you do not look as you used to do, Miss Helen," said she, after the first salutation ; " I am afraid things do not go as they should do with you. You have not forgot
the

the wickedness of that old mischief-maker, Mrs. Ashton ; oh, she will meet with her reward one of these days !—I assure you, Miss Helen, she can scarcely shew her nose outside the door, without being hooted at ; for all the village hate her as much as they loved you and poor master. As to Miss Sophy Cremur, whom she is going to make Master Percival marry, she is such a simpleton that nobody thinks about her.—'Tis hard though—'tis very hard that such a sensible good young man should be ordained to spend his life with one that has not the sense to cry bo to a goose. Poor dear Mr. Percival, how bad he looked when he was last here ! I never shall forget him when he said—' Oh, Agnes, do not talk to me of past happiness, unless you wish to break my heart !'—God knows how far it was from my wish to give him pain !"

" I must give you the same prohibition, Agnes," said Helen, attempting to smile ;
" I cannot bear to hear you talk in this manner ; if, therefore, you value my happiness,

piness, you will never again speak to me of Courtenay."

"If I *value* your happiness!—Oh, Miss Helen, it is cruel of you to use an if, when you know that I would run through fire and water to serve you."

"I do indeed know the sincerity of your regard for me, my good Agnes," she replied; "and believe me, the greatest proof of it you can now afford me, is by avoiding this painfully interesting subject."

Agnes wiped a tear that trickled down her cheek, and for the future promised to be silent. Helen spent great part of the morning in visiting her village neighbours. On her return she met with Mr. Mallett, who was walking in pursuit of her. It was a pleasant morning, and they continued their ramble to the cliff, that overhung the sea. Helen heaved a sigh as she passed the window from whence Lady Elvira Murgrove first saw her: how far was the recollection of her then flattering preference
from

from giving her pleasure! That kind patroness now accused her as a monster of ingratitude. They proceeded to the point from whence she used to descend to think on Courtenay: it was the spot on which he bade her adieu, when he was about to quit England. Mr. Mallett read the emotions which revisiting these well known scenes excited, and knew how impossible it would be to engage her mind on any other subject; he therefore allowed her to indulge her mournful reflections in silence.

As they slowly returned, they perceived approaching them Miss Cremur and Miss Ashton, attended by Hartly. The appearance of Helen greatly surprised the ladies, who had not heard of her arrival. Hartly bestowed on her, as he passed, a most inquisitive look, but condescended not to notice her by any salutation.

"Bless me," said Miss Cremur, "who could have thought Miss Coleby would ever

ever come here again ! I was in hopes Mr. Mallett had quite turned her off, now such scandalous stories have been circulated respecting her conduct to Lady Elvira Musgrove. I should not at all like for Percival to return and find her here."

" Oh, Sophia," exclaimed Harriet, " can you really be so illiberal as to wish the poor orphan excluded from Mr. Mallett's patronage !—for my own part, I rejoice at his continued protection. And can you possibly feel apprehensive of her regaining Courtenay's affection ?—it is, excuse the harsh term, a mean-spirited fear. Can you submit to bestow your whole heart on an ingrate, whose best sensibilities are given to another ?—Exert your resolution, your wounded pride, my friend, and spurn the wretch that has not sufficient discernment to rate your talents and virtues above the humble-minded Helen. Indeed, Sophia, I fear you will not answer the description I am giving of you, as the heroine of my novel.

novel. If you should prove inferior to the interesting character I have drawn, what unceasing sorrow will it occasion me !”

“ And are you really about to communicate all the sublime ideas with which your cultivated mind abounds to the press ?” asked Hartly. “ How anxious I feel to peruse the volumes of wisdom that your prolific brain invents ! May a humble petitioner hope to succeed in his request to read the interesting manuscript ?”

“ Indeed,” replied Harriet, with an affected simper, “ you flatter me too much ; the effusions of my poor brain do not deserve such eulogiums. However, if you will promise to become an impartial critic, I will readily submit my works to your judgment.”

“ Amiable diffidence !” said Hartly ; “ I should be a wretch, depraved indeed, to abuse such generous confidence : but cannot your prolific genius produce some little elegant composition on the unexpected appearance of Miss Coleby ?”

“ I have

"I have been thinking of it, I confess," said Harriet; "but my muse is sullen; I sometimes vainly court her favours: however I will make an effort to produce a few extempore lines by to-morrow morning."

Hartly smiled.—"How I venerate the superiority of your genius! An extempore poem, composed in fourteen hours, will indeed astonish the learned world."

Harriet again simpered her gratitude for the undeserved praise he bestowed, perfectly well pleased with which, she bade him good night, when they reached their home. The spirited composition which Harriet determined to produce by the morning, kept her awake the greatest part of the night; but in vain she sought her muse's influence—not one line rewarded her toil; and at length, wearied by her unsuccessful efforts, she resigned her powers to the oblivious god, whose solicitations began to grow importunate. She, however, enjoyed this state of forgetfulness but a few minutes, for her muse, more indulgent

indulgent to her sleeping than wakeful abilities, composed two lines, which excited such a degree of tumultuous pleasure, as effectually shook off the lethargic power that steeped her senses in forgetfulness.

Aurora's earliest rays had now partially begun to illumine her chamber, and she flew to her *escritoire*, for materials to preserve the spontaneous composition. Again she endeavoured to resign herself to the embraces of Somnus, but the joy which this unexpected success occasioned, obstinately persisted in keeping him at bay; till finding that every sleeping and wakeful effort was alike unsuccessful towards the completion of her poem, she at length determined to tell Hartly, that she had slept too soundly to recollect her promise to him.

The conviction of her incapacity was to herself severely mortifying, particularly as the approbation of such a correct, though partial critic, was to have been the reward.

He

He was interesting—nay, his manners were most insinuating, and she certainly had some reason to believe that he beheld her with the eye of affection ; what else meant the sigh that escaped him the preceding evening, when he pressed her hand at bidding her adieu ?—Oh, could such a flattering conjecture be realized !—would he but compensate the many, many bitter pangs she had experienced from the neglect of his undiscerning sex, how unbounded would be her gratitude !—Its lively effusions must surely perfect his happiness. The prospect was irresistibly alluring ; it took the full possession of her mind, and insensibly drew it from the one that had been before predominant.

Fatigued with the restless night she had spent, she arose early, and adorning her person with becoming negligence, after bestowing on her pallid cheek as much of the roseate hue as the morning zephyrs might be supposed to produce, she strolled to the beach alone. Sophia would have
proved

proved no obstacle to her proposed plan, for she was engaged ; besides, she possessed not sensibility enough to rival her in the estimation of a swain of Hartly's discernment ; and as to fortune, she was convinced his sentiments were much too liberal to be influenced by such dross. But should she be fortunate enough to succeed in the scheme her imagination had conjured up, a third person might interrupt the tide of soft sensibility, that probably might, in secret, be wafted to her ear.

Thus armed for conquest, she proceeded to the furthestmost point of rocks, where she seated herself, apparently fixed in deep meditation on the smooth expanse before her, but in reality watching, with the most anxious solicitude, for the object that at present possessed her most favourable sentiments.

How delightful, should chance direct his steps to this secluded spot !—how interesting, to confess to him the fatigue which her delicate frame suffered from such a

walk!—the anxious sympathy that such a complaint must excite in a bosom of sensibility!—the dear—the inexpressible pleasure of being supported by him, while, at intervals, he would bestow on her looks of the tenderest concern, so far transported her imagination, that, forgetful of her situation, she sprang from her seat, and rapidly advancing towards the sea, she clasped her hands, and exclaimed with fervour—“Oh, if it ever—ever should be my happy lot——”

A grasp, rather unlike the gentle pressure of a lover's embrace, roused her from her reverie, and, mortifying to all sublimity of sentiment, she found herself encircled by a rustic of the lowest order.—Unconscious of his intention, she threw on him a look sufficiently contemptuous to annihilate one of such inferior nature: the man, however, continued his hold undauntedly.

“No, no, Miss,” said he, “you may wince and bluster till you are tired, we shall
shall

shall soon see who is strongest ; thof I be but a poor man, I can do my duty as well as another ; and I will never stand quiet to see a feller creter go for to offer to destroy herself, while I can use my limbs to prevent it."

" Unhand me, villain !" loudly vociferated Harriet, with a countenance and voice that confirmed his first conjecture, of her being insane.—" Do you know who I am ?"

" *Iss, iss*, I know who you *be* well *nough*," he replied ; " and I wont leave ye till I have *seed* ye safe in your mother's keeping ; 'tis *ent* much to her credit to let ye run about to such out of the way places without a guard, I think, since ye beant able to take care of yourself."

" Was ever insolence so daring !" exclaimed the indignant Harriet. " Fellow, you shall pay for this outrage."

" Outrageous, in good faith," answered the man, who now thought himself obliged,

from common humanity, though to his own loss, for he worked by the task, and had a family to maintain from his earnings, to place the poor *mazed* woman in safety: accordingly he held her arm with a firm grasp, and forcibly dragged the struggling heroine across the beach.

It was by this time filled with company, and the astonishment which her appearance, together with her singular escort, excited, completed her chagrin. Every individual turned to gaze on her as she passed; and the expressions of—"Strange taste!"—"Happy rustic!" accompanied by sarcastic shrugs, convinced her that she was accused of sanctioning the man's familiarity. This idea was humiliating in the extreme; and to remove the mortifying impression, she again used most violent exertions to be set at liberty, which so greatly encreased the mirth of the beholders, that she lost all patience, and bawled for assistance, in so loud a tone,

tone, that two gentlemen, expecting still greater diversion, hastened to offer their assistance to the suffering fair.

The man, however, convinced that he had rendered her an essential service, told the strangers, when they demanded the lady's freedom, in rather an authoritative tone, very coolly, that the young woman had lost her wits, and that he passed in the nick of time to save her from drowning herself.—“ And,” added he, “ as I found her in such a lonely spot, I did *ent* think it safe to leave her, so I *comed* here with her; but if you will be so well pleased as to *zee* her safe to her mother's, Madame Ashton's yonder, up there, in that white *houze*, I will leave her, and be much obliged to you in the bargain, for this will be a sad *hinderment* in my day's work.”

Before they had time to answer, Hartly, with Miss Cremur resting on his arm, joined them; and on hearing what had

F 3 happened,

happened, requested that the lady might be liberated, and entrusted to his protection, which was immediately complied with, and the two strangers, on whom Hartly significantly winked, retired.

But though Harriet had regained her liberty, she could by no means recal that pleasing train of thought that had placed her in so awkward a situation ; for the evident struggle in Hartly's face to suppress a hearty laugh, was so unlike the solicitude of a lover, on such a distressing occasion, that it mortified her even more than his attention to Sophia had done.

How they came together was a circumstance that did not pass without much conjecture. Sophia had never been fond of early rambles, and her assurance to Harriet, that she now walked to meet her, she rather felt inclined to doubt ; yet surely they could not have met by appointment. Sophia's whole heart was bestowed on Courtenay ; how, therefore, could

could she make assignations with another? —no, their meeting must certainly have been accidental; and with this conviction, she felt tolerably reconciled: the morning's adventure had not, however, turned out quite so gratifying as she had fondly hoped.

CHAP. VI.

" 'Twas like a palsy to me when he stept
Out of the carriage ; he was grown so thin,
His cheeks so delicately sallow, and his eyes
Had such a dim and rakish hollowness."

SOUTHEY.

BUT a short time could Harriet console herself with the flattering presumption of Hartly's attentions being paid to herself ; it was soon too evident that Sophia was the powerful magnet that attracted him ; and, strange as it might appear, she was evidently pleased with his assiduities ; and poor Harriet again suffered all the pangs of unrequited love. Her muse, which had so
cruelly

cruelly rejected all her solicitations, she now slighted in her turn, and courted solitude as the only softener of her sorrows. Often did she, at eventide, pace the pebbly beach, when the sullen murmur of the rolling billows was congenial to her feelings. Long had she wandered in melancholy mood, when a youth, of even more prepossessing and elegant deportment than either Courtenay or Hartly, discovered her nocturnal rambles.

At first he passed her in silence; but a longing, lingering look, as she hastened homeward, bespoke a degree of interest in her favour. The adventure dwelt on her mind, and prevented her from sleeping.

The following evening she anticipated a repetition of the interview, and comforted with the hope, she could even, with composure, behold Hartly's attention to Sophia. At length the soft hour of twilight hovered over the earth.—“ Oh how interesting to lovers !” faintly articulated Harriet, with a sigh. She looked round, fearing,

fearing, yet half wishing that the dear object of her cogitations might hear and respond the sympathetic breath: she was, however, spared the blushing anguish of having betrayed her sensibility—no respondent sigh met her ear; in vain she studied the most gracefully negligent attitudes; in vain she stood absorbed in painful thought, pensively watching the advancing waves, till they roughly approached, and filled her shoes with their humid influence. In vain she shrieked for assistance; no friendly arm was near to support her sinking frame—no congenial heart to commiserate the sufferings that her abstraction had occasioned. Dripping and forlorn, therefore, she bent her unhappy steps towards her mother's habitation, where the appearance of Hartly, seated by the side of Sophia, and admiring a beautiful full moon, failed not to aggravate her distress.

On her solitary pillow she sought that relief which insensible mankind refused her. The inspiring hope that to-morrow might

might prove more fortunate, at length afforded consolation, and she allowed the god to shed his poppies around her head.

The morning at length appeared, and again the disconsolate maiden quitted her sorrowful couch, and repaired to the beach. Fortune now resolved, in some measure, to recompense the sufferings she had experienced, and sent the interesting stranger to walk pensively and slowly by the sea-side. Harrie was very near before she appeared to notice him: a sympathetic scream, at this unexpected interview, roused him from his reverie. Common-civility obliged him to apologize for the alarm he had occasioned, and common civility obliged her to answer his salutation. A mutual charm seemed to lengthen the conversation; he entertained her with the description of Marlow House, his paternal residence, its superlative splendour, his curricie and pair, his livery servants, and a variety of *etceteras*, all calculated to in-

spire his auditor with a high opinion of his respectability. The gay life in which he had been condemned to move, had been too much for his delicate nerves, and he had now sought Alvondown, as a sweet retirement best suited to his tender spirits. Total solitude, indeed, he found little likely to restore his cheerfulness; he panted for a congenial mind, and in a female friend alone could he expect to find it.

This was an appeal to her feelings which it would have been savage not to admit; she therefore, from mere common humanity, offered her services in attempting to dissipate his *ennui*, for which he expressed the sincerest gratitude. Thus mutually pleased, or at least apparently so, with their morning's adventure, they parted.

Hartly was Sophia's early visitor; but the preference now gave no pain to the happy Harriet; she had at last found a being, whose congenial heart sympathized with

with the feelings of her own, and kindly promised to compensate for all the cold neglect she had hitherto sustained.

It was now sufficiently evident that Hartly's attentions were far from displeasing to Sophia, and he flattered himself that she would eventually accept him ; he well knew that Courtenay's whole heart was bestowed on one, whom his judgment and feelings, had he suffered himself to be guided by their impulse, pronounced far superior to Sophia, and indeed to every one of her sex ; and had she possessed a fortune, he would have preferred her to any woman in creation, and would have left no means untried to gain her affection ; but devoid of worldly *possessions*, it would have been the highest imprudence to think of making her his wife,— He therefore seriously turned his thoughts towards the attainment of Miss Cremur's hand and fortune, to which he expected no violent opposition from the indifferent Courtenay.

Lady

Lady Elvira, although she at first severely blamed Helen's conduct, felt still more indignant against Hartly ; she however suffered the first effusions of her resentment to subside, before she formed a resolution. She then investigated his character dispassionately, and discovered, under the semblance of every moral virtue, his duplicity and libertinism. Though jealousy had, for a moment, obscured the generous sentiments of her heart, and induced her to wound the feelings of her friend, she was soon conscious of the injustice and cruelty of her conduct, and of her friend's innocence.

Candour had no sooner reinstated the disgraced Helen in her favourable opinion, than she would have acknowledged the sentiment, and begged forgiveness ; but rumour soon announced to her Helen's respectable situation in Mrs. Elton's family. At this intelligence her impatience to address her was immediately repressed.

" She has now," thought Lady Elvira,
" found

"found friends who have discernment and sensibility enough to protect her. Under such circumstances, I cannot explain myself; assured that she never deserved my unfeeling desertion, she will rather think I seek to extenuate my conduct to the world, and to those who are undoubtedly in her confidence, than that my concession proceeds from a real conviction of my error. She no longer wants my friendship, and the loss of her esteem is but a deserved punishment for the injustice of my conduct towards her."

Vainly did Hartly endeavour to regain his wonted influence over her; she would listen to nothing he alledged in vindication of his principles. Had he really preferred Helen to herself, and had he honourably confessed the sentiment, however severely her feelings had been wounded, her rectitude and strength of mind would soon have healed the smart, had not the mean-spirited hypocrisy, through which she read correctly his innate depravity, ap-

peared so truly despicable ; and with this conviction she rejoiced at her escape from such an engagement.

In Miss Cremur Hartly found not so scrutinizing, or so able a judge ; he had been avowedly the favoured lover of Lady Elvira Musgrove, and the plausible story that he invented, of his having left her from the conviction of some misconduct which he wished not to publish, she readily believed. His preference was therefore highly flattering to her vanity, and she began to fancy that she could even derive a greater degree of satisfaction from rivaling a woman of Lady Elvira Musgrove's rank, and acknowledged perfections, than the humble-minded Helen ; and she could likewise enjoy the pleasure of satiating her revenge on Courtenay fully, by putting the law in force against his father.

Hartly, who saw the marked aversion with which Sophia beheld Helen, adopted her mode of conduct, and never met this her formidable rival without bestowing on her

her looks of the most insulting contempt. Such insinuating behaviour soon made rapid advances in Sophia's favourable sentiments, and he, at length, ventured to declare himself her lover. The confession gratified her vanity, and she half resolved to accept his proposals. When, however, she drew comparisons between him and Courtenay, the preponderating scale was always in favour of the latter; and she persuaded herself, that if the tender passion in reality possessed any share of her heart, more of the sensation existed for Courtenay than any other individual. He had indeed treated her with the most mortifying indifference; but would not her conquest prove more complete, if she could, by unremitting attention to his wishes, at length conquer his repugnance, than if she had been the first object of his choice? —At any rate, she should triumph over Helen, who, though without cause, she considered herself bound to hate and persecute, to the fullest extent of her power.

A rival,

A rival, she however believed, might answer some good purpose, and she determined to retain Hartly in her chains, till Percival should be apprised of his intention towards her. For this purpose she wrote to Courtenay, entreating him, if he possessed one particle of affection for her, who rested every hope of happiness on him, to return to Alvondown immediately, for she felt herself unable longer to endure the cruel suspense that his absence and precarious state of health occasioned.

The letter was dispatched, and soon reached its place of destination; it was a summons that threw Courtenay into the most distressing state of agitation. How could he act?—He was called on to fulfil his engagement to her, who had thus generously offered herself and fortune to him; was it not a strong and forcible claim on his gratitude?—and had he not already resolved to accept it?—Why then did he thus delay to realize his intention?—"It must be completed sooner or later," he thought,

thought, "and I am highly culpable in thus procrastinating an event so decisive."

Without further hesitation he departed, and determined to hasten the celebration of that ceremony, which had on a former attempt betrayed him into such a state of imbecility. As he approached the too-interesting village, his heart palpitated most violently.

Helen was now Mr. Mallett's guest ; how could he consent to inflict on her heart the bitter agony he himself experienced. Mrs. Ashton and his father would insist on a jovial day ; Mr. Mallett must attend ; the whole parish would be apprised of an event that had already occasioned so much conversation.—"No," he exclaimed, "I will not be my Helen's executioner !—nor shall the celebration of the ceremony take place till after her departure, however importunate her oppressors may be to effect their purpose."

Helen, totally unacquainted with what passed in Mrs. Ashton's circle, was preparing

ing to accompany Mr. Mallett on an evening excursion, when she was summoned to the parlour to a gentleman, and she was greatly surprised, on entering the room, at being accosted by Mr. Lifford, who apologized for his intrusion, but said, that in making a little excursion, the beautiful village of Alvondown had induced him to deviate from the direct plan of his route; and that he found it impossible to be so near Miss Coleby, without taking the liberty of enquiring after her health. She received him with politeness, and introduced him to Mr. Mallett, as a friend of Mrs. Elton's, which was a sufficient recommendation to ensure him a favourable reception.

He was accosted by Mr. Mallett with an expression of hospitality that evidently flowed from his heart, and he could not refuse the good man's pressing invitation to stay the evening. He expressed an inclination to spend some days at Alvondown, the neighbourhood of which he conceived

conceived to be highly picturesque, and Mr. Mallett's friendly treatment increased the wish: he offered to be himself his guide to all the situations worthy of notice, and engaged him to spend the following day at the Vicarage.

He was true to the appointment, and Mr. Mallett fulfilled his engagement to ride with him before dinner. Helen presided at their simple though elegant repast, and Lifford thought he had never seen her so interesting; his looks so evidently spoke the sentiments of his heart, that Mr. Mallett easily read them, and rejoiced at the discovery of a partiality, which he ventured to hope she might one day return.

An evening walk was proposed, to which Mr. Mallett assented, but recollecting some business that required his presence, he excused himself, and requested Helen to undertake the office of conducting Mr. Lifford. She would gladly have excused herself, but common politeness obliged her to accede to her friend's proposal;

posal; she, however, confined the excursion to a very short distance from the house.

An air of embarrassment, which pervaded the conversation on the part of Lifford, was so conspicuous, that it led Helen to suspect the cause. It was not from vanity that such an idea suggested itself, but the real dread of a circumstance which would so effectually steel his heart to the merits of her friend; he however introduced no topic that could confirm her apprehensions; she had therefore no pretext for avoiding him, though she shortened her walk, and soon returned to the house. He again spent the evening at the Vicarage, and professed his intention of prolonging his stay another day at Alvondown.

Helen, as was her usual custom, arose early the following morning; the weather was sultry, and instead of walking, she sought shelter in the arbour, at the top of the orchard. The appearance of Courtenay, already seated there, had the effect of electricity on her frame. Too much astonished

astonished to speak, she continued gazing on him, till he advanced, and taking her hand, apologized for the fright he had occasioned her.

“Forgive me, Helen, it was not my intention to surprise you ; I wished to see our good Mr. Mallett, and I thought this the most likely hour to find an opportunity of conversing with him alone. I know he is an early riser, and on hearing he had not left his bed, I wandered to this spot, to wait his arrival.”

“You have indeed surprised me, Courtenay,” she replied ; “but you are ill,” she added, in a voice greatly agitated.

The remark was indeed just ; his eyes were sunk, and his form miserably wasted : a hectic glow, indeed, painted his cheek, but the hollow cough, which he vainly endeavoured to suppress, too fatally disclosed the nature of his complaints.

“I am not very well, Helen,” he replied, while his burning hand confirmed the remark ; “but my native village will perhaps

haps restore my health. The conviction of your happiness would do much for me : tell me candidly, Helen, have you not found an object less unfortunate than your Courtenay, on whom you now bestow your affection ?”

“ What can you mean ?” she asked.

“ Do my words require an explanation ?” said he. “ Is it possible that Mr. Lifford can follow you hither, without some sentiment warmer than friendship, and would he be your solitary companion without some encouragement ?”

“ Oh, Courtenay, can you indeed believe my heart so lightly bestowed ?—Do not pay yourself so ill a compliment ; had it been so vain a thing, your discernment would have withheld you from an effort, or even a wish to gain it.”

“ Pardon me, Helen,” said he, “ I deserve your reproof ; but indeed circumstances have sadly spoiled my temper—a poor excuse perhaps you will think for impertinent curiosity. I ought to rejoice at the
prospect

prospect of seeing you united to a worthy man ; but still this nature is refractory ; I cannot swallow the bitter potion prepared for me, without various distortions. Shall I confess, Helen, that a sort of lingering hope, that our prospects will brighten, most forcibly clings to my heart. Miss Cremur sent for me, and I now find, for the purpose of rousing my sleepy faculties by the attention of a rival. Should she really give him the preference—dare I hope it ? —Gracious Heaven, if she should !—and some unforeseen means of extricating my father occur, what years of bliss might we not anticipate !”

His last words called the tears to Helen’s eyes. Courtenay’s altered frame seemed not destined to endure its mortal tabernacle even many months ; what then had she left to wish for in this world ?—If, indeed, she could be his—if such a tie could be sanctioned by duty, though but for a moment, it would afford the melancholy consolation of receiving his dying breath,

breath, uncensured by the world. But how could such an event be realized?—Should Sophia marry Hartly, and old Mr. Courtenay be thrown into prison, how severely would Percival's conscience upbraid him for neglecting the offered ransom!

The appearance of Mr. Mallett, walking slowly up the orchard, afforded her an opportunity of retiring. Courtenay's presence was a restraint to the feelings it had excited, and she longed to indulge them alone. Courtenay was rapidly approaching that blessed abode where his sufferings would be fully recompensed. Could she then regret the transition from wretchedness to perfect bliss?—He deserved unceasing felicity, and such would be his reward in that world, where justice cannot waver: how selfish then to lament the exchange!—Yet nature, whose language cannot be suppressed, spoke in her tearful eyes and sad heart, on which rested the conviction that she must bid Courtenay (as far as respected this world) an eternal adieu!

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

“ For what avail vast heaps of gold,
When Death his awful writ shall send ?
Though Folly swell, and Pride look cold,
The mask must drop, the farce must end.”

DODSLEY'S Collection.

A FAR different scene passed at Mrs. Ashton's. Harriet had, for the first time in her life, received overtures of marriage, which flattering proposal came from the interesting stranger. It was far too pleasing to require a moment's hesitation ; her dear mamma's consent, indeed, had not been asked, for old people are so merce-

nary, that a world of time might be wasted in finding his rent-roll of estates, &c. &c.; and nasty worldly-minded attornies must be employed to bestow on her a jointure, as if she doubted her dear Burnby's honour. She was resolved to convince him that she harboured not such an injurious thought; the marriage ceremony was therefore to be clandestinely performed, and mamma surprised into happiness.

The declaration that had thus determined the most important event of her life, took place in the evening, and chased every inclination from her sparkling eyes, to resign their lustre to the poppy-shedding god.

After a sleepless night, therefore, she arose with the sun, determined again to court the favours of her tardy muse, who, on such an occasion, she doubted not would aid her wishes. How indeed to begin, or what sort of a subject to strike out, was for some time doubtful. At length, however, she determined to sing her

her virgin sorrows at quitting the maternal roof; and after many fruitless efforts, the following line was committed to paper—

Alas! poor, hapless, lovelorn maiden.

Sophia, whose energies were awakened by an equally interesting subject, and who had seen Courtenay slowly pass the door, determined to excite his jealousy by a flirtation with Hartly, whom she had appointed to meet. She hastened to Harriet's room, for some ornaments of dress that had been left there, determined to render herself as irresistible as possible. Harriet, seated at her desk, the solitary line at the top of the paper, and her pen full of ink, suspended mournfully over it, could not fail of exciting the risible faculties of her friend.

"Your paper is still destined to retain its snowy hue unsullied, I fear, my dear," said she; "indeed your muse is inexorable, Harriet, and I would resent her insult-

sulting contempt with becoming dignity, and turn my thoughts to a more interesting and less forbidden subject. From my window, which you know commands the beach, I have seen your interesting incognito, and were not my whole heart already engrossed, I know not but his very appearance would induce me to bestow on him a corner of it. But come and relieve his suspense ; he is sorrowfully pacing the beach, fondly hoping to be blessed with the presence and conversation of his beloved."

"Is he?" said Harriet, starting from her pensive attitude ; "then I will go and speak comfort to his wounded heart. Oh Sophia, the dear bliss of being beloved by an amiable object !—Would you not gladly exchange your cold swain for such a Mark Antony?"

"Not quite so cold as you may conceive," replied Sophia, somewhat piqued at the comparison ; and without waiting till Harriet had equipped herself, she hastened

tened to join the apparently enamoured Hartly.

Courtenay, whose nights were generally restless, had that morning risen early, and was returning from a long walk, when he met the party. Sophia was well attended, he therefore considered it unnecessary to join her. Her heart exulted at the jealousy which she doubted not this meeting would excite in his bosom; for though conscious he did not feel the warmth of affection for her that she wished to inspire, that littleness of mind which knew no basis for any earthly action but self-love, or the prospect of emolument, could not conceive it possible for a sincere and steady attachment to exist for so destitute a being as Helen, from a union with whom nothing but poverty and distress could be expected to result. Little indeed was she aware of the bliss she was bestowing on him; and that though he felt it his duty to preserve his father from public disgrace, human nature revolted at the sacrifice he

was about to offer. Nor did she suspect that, as he passed her, and discovered Hartly to be her escort, a ray of hope darted unbidden across his mind. Fain would he have flown to Helen with the interesting tidings, but propriety refused him this consolation, and he returned to his father's, where, in his own apartment, he was at liberty to indulge his solitary reflections.

Lifford was an early visitor at Mr. Mallett's; he found the good man and Helen at breakfast, and was prevailed on to share the repast.

"Your acquaintance of the beau monde would pronounce you degenerated to a very rustic," said Mr. Mallett, "could they behold you breaking your fast, at an hour when they are retiring to rest their weary bodies, after the excesses of the night."

"Such are the world's perverted customs, I confess, Sir," he replied, "which I, as well as my associates in theory, condemn,

demn, although we want resolution to separate from the multitudinous stream ; who indeed shall set on foot a reformation with the least hope of success ? That we may individually adhere to the rules that nature has prescribed, is most certain, but how few have resolution to endure the shock of ridicule, which is so sure to be levelled at singularity of every denomination !”

“ And to what cause can we impute this dread of ridicule but imbecility of mind ?” asked Mr. Mallett ; “ singularity in a good cause ought surely to be supported with firmness ; for though the affectation of eccentricity in trifles betrays both pride and weakness, it deserves not those harsh epithets, when only adopted in opposition to folly.”

“ I grant the justice of your argument, Sir,” Lifford replied ; “ but so totally different are theory and practice, that though I could now declaim with the utmost severity against the barbarous inversion of

natural hours, were I in London, and requested to dine with a friend at eight o'clock, I should, without scruple, accept the invitation. Indeed, to resist this universal custom would be to exclude myself from all intercourse with the world, since fashion exercises despotic sway over the polite circles, and

‘ All were not made for one, but one for all :’

And in my opinion, exclusion from civilized society will produce worse effects than accommodating ourselves, in some degree, to its rules; for surely the politeness that teaches us to diffuse our pleasures is more likely to meliorate the heart, than that seclusion which deprives the individual of a sharer in his pursuits, and contracts his heart within the narrow bounds of self-interest.”

“ This is pursuing the argument to extremes, Sir,” said Mr. Mallett: “ I approve not of a hermit’s life, nor the expulsion of social affections, but with moderation

deration I would prefer solitude, both in a religious and moral point of view. It gives us leisure to study our own hearts, and if we have sufficient firmness, affords us the opportunity of chastening our evil propensities, and encouraging the progressive growth of such as are good."

"I cannot altogether agree with you, Sir," said Lifford; "few people, I believe, perceive their errors, without a clearer mirror than their own judgments can furnish them with. In mixed society, if the talents and conversation of our companions please us, we naturally endeavour to render ourselves agreeable to them—this wish keeps our faculties on the alert, for we dare not expect that indulgence to our imperfections from others, which we bestow on ourselves; and I likewise think, that though polished manners may, and frequently do, conceal all the destructive passions of which human nature is capable, yet as those baleful enemies are too apt to hold dominion over the mind in all its va-

rious situations of life, the habitual reciprocation of external civilities will do more towards eradicating them, than that apathy to the pleasures and pursuits of others, which solitude is so apt to create."

"I fear," said Mr. Mallett, "that in the most polished circles, suavity of manners more frequently proceeds from highly practised dissimulation than innate philanthropy. Perhaps to superficial observation, there is little difference between artificial kindness and the real overflowings of a benevolent mind; nor in our indiscriminate intercourse with mankind is a stricter scrutiny necessary: but in my opinion, the habit of practising deceit has a greater chance of hardening and contracting the heart, than of chastening and improving it. In retirement duplicity can answer no purpose; we look around us with unprejudiced eyes; candour represents every object as it really is; and if meditating in the ample field of nature does not make the heart better, I think we shall
vainly

vainly expect its amendment in crowded halls or stately palaces."

"You judge from your own feelings, Sir," said Lifford, "which no circumstance or situation could pollute; but undisciplined minds, I think, acquire, in solitude, a fastidiousness and obstinacy very hostile to urbanity of manners, or liberality of sentiment."

"You are becoming personal in your applications," said Mr. Mallett, with a smile; "it is therefore time to drop the argument; I however confess with gratitude, that nature has implanted no very evil propensities in my composition; I therefore claim no merit to myself for their expulsion, though were such a task requisite, I would seek solitude, and not crowds for the performance."

Lifford readily acceded to Mr. Mallett's hint, and entered on a less argumentative topic, in which Helen could bear her part. In the course of the day he found an opportunity of declaring to her the favourable

able sentiments with which she had inspired him. Vain, however, were his importunities; she declared her inability to return his regard, although she expressed her gratitude for his flattering preference; but while she spoke, a sigh for the unrequited love of poor Maria escaped her.

Convinced, by the firmness with which she spoke, that her heart was irrevocably bestowed on Courtenay, he ceased to importune her; and Mr. Mallett saw with pain the rejection of his suite. He had encouraged an idea that the hopelessness of her attachment might induce her to use strong methods to eradicate it; and in Lifford he perceived every quality requisite to conciliate her affection. He ventured gently to lead to the subject as they pursued their evening walk.

"Can you wish me to prostitute my vows, my dear Sir?" she answered. "I could feel no inducements but selfish ones to accept his generous offer, and how humiliated should I be in my own eyes, were

I to

I to act on such interested principles! the cold friendship that I could bestow, would be a poor compensation for the worthy heart he offers me."

"Shall I venture to style your ideas romantic, my dear child?" said Mr. Mallett. "Lifford knows how you are situated, and he is well aware that your heart is not so lightly bestowed as to be easily withdrawn from the object that so long possessed it; but he would accept you, notwithstanding this mortifying conviction, if you would receive his addresses.— So implicitly does he rely on your good sense, and rectitude of principles, that he is assured, gratitude for his unvarying attention would in time inspire a warmer sentiment. With respect to disparity of circumstances, I hope, my Helen, that you have conquered the pride which you once confessed the superiority of your associates excited. Benefits conferred by a truly generous heart, can never, with justice, create such a sensation; for so far

far from exacting dependent submission, genuine beneficence seeks opportunities of bestowing favours, when they will be felt as obligations, and recoils from the shadow of becoming burthensome. A fellow-creature, in any degree dependent on a feeling mind, will, from that very circumstance, excite sympathy and affection; and with respect to little inequalities of temper, we must bear each others infirmities in every situation."

"I have practically proved that I admit the justice of your argument, Sir," said Helen; "had I not done so, I should never have been an inmate in the families of Lady Elvira Musgrove and Mrs. Elton; but surely a warmer sentiment than gratitude is requisite for the person whom we promise to love and honour, at the sacred altar; nor could any motives justify me to myself, were I at such a place to practise deceit."

Mr. Mallett perceived how repugnant to her feelings was the subject; he therefore

fore dropped it. On their return to the house, Helen received a letter directed to her in an unknown hand ; she immediately opened it, and found that it conveyed the important intelligence of Mr. Clemments' death, and expressed her sister's anxious wishes to see her immediately at T——.

"My dear Emily has at last the anticipation of some happy days," said Helen, while she put the letter into Mr. Mallett's hand.

"It is repugnant to our feelings to rejoice at the death of a fellow-creature," he replied, when he had perused it, "but it is scarcely possible to repress a sensation of pleasure at the tidings this letter communicates. Poor Mrs. Clemments' trial has been severe, and the patient resignation with which she has endured it, will now, I hope, be rewarded with years of happiness. You, my Helen, are the friend who can most essentially contribute to her comfort, and I doubt not but your efforts to efface the recollection of her past sorrows

rows will do much towards alleviating your own."

Helen endeavoured to hope so too; however, for the present all selfish considerations were lost, in the pleasing conviction of her sister's returning happiness."

CHAP. VIII.

"Now far from him and bliss I roam,
All nature wears a change,
The azure sky seems wrapt in gloom,
And every place looks strange."

GRAVES.

THE following morning Helen prepared for her departure. It would be cruel to leave the village without bidding poor old Agnes adieu ; she therefore arose early to visit her. On entering the cottage, the clack of four or five female tongues astonished her with the violence of their vociferation, and some minutes elapsed before they perceived her. At length, however,
every

every throat was extended, to announce to her the wonderful tale; and she was repeatedly obliged to request that one only would speak at a time, before she could at all understand them.

The circumstances that had caused such universal clamour, and thrown every gossip of the village into such commotion, were no other than the elopement of Miss Cremur with Mr. Hartly, and Miss Ashton with an unknown gentleman, in two chaises, that had waited at Mrs. Ashton's door a full hour, and had driven off exactly as the church clock struck four that very morning.

Agnes could not conceal the joy which this information had afforded her.—“My poor dear Master Percival,” said she, “will be Miss Helen's husband at last; you see that what's ordained will come to pass, e'en though the devil stands at the door; and for *sartain* Madam Ashton is very little better than one of his imps, for all the employment of her life was making mischief; and
now.

now she's paid off in her own coin, for she thought to have managed Miss Sophy's fortune; though there it would have been the bitter bit, as a body may say, for Master Percival, gentle as he is, would have been too deep for her. As to her own daughter, she's *loped* off with nobody knows who; but she was always a romance-like young lady—too wise to know any thing about her neighbours, or any other folks."

"But she's gone off with a great squire," said one of the neighbours; "and they say he has got more solid gold than Farmer Sinker's waggon could carry off in a day; and his *sarvant* says that the very sauce-pans and teakettles are all made of solid silver."

"Aye, aye, he may talk, and so may his sarvant," said Agnes, "if any body's fool enough to believe *em*; but poor Miss Harriet was a harmless young lady, and I'm sorry for *she* after all."

Helen's feelings so entirely overpowered her

her at this unexpected intelligence, that she could scarcely find breath to ask if the account was really true; and Agnes, who now discovered her emotion, dismissed the rest of her guests, that she might endeavour to raise the drooping spirits of her dear young lady.

"I am so happy," said she, "that I shan't be myself again this month, to think that after all the wickedness that hath been hatched to separate Master Percival and my sweet Miss Helen, they should come together."

"Do not be so sanguine in your expectations, my good Agnes," said Helen; "believe not that such happiness is in store for us. What will now become of old Mr. Courtenay?"

"Let the old brute go to prison," she replied, "where he deserved to be long ago."

"Silence, Agnes," quickly interrupted Helen, "I will not hear you talk thus; however Mr. Courtenay has acted, Percival knows
knows

knows the duties of a son, and I applaud, I venerate his conduct ; and I am well assured that his heart will be stung with remorse, when he hears of the event which will prevent him from fulfilling his engagement to Miss Cremur."

" Oh, you are too good—you are both much too good for this world ; but God will one day reward you. I must, however, rejoice, indeed Miss Helen I must—if you kill me I can't help it—at Mr. Percival's escape."

As soon as Helen had in some degree recovered her composure, she related to Agnes the circumstance that had occasioned her visit, and now obliged her to quit the Vicarage.

The account threw Agnes into almost frantic joy.—" Miss Emily delivered too !"—It was incredible—the joy was too much for one day !—She should then, perhaps, see her once more before she died ; that blessing, followed by the marriage of Master Percival and her dear Miss Helen, would

would complete her earthly happiness; and at that moment she could not admit one particle of sorrow, even for the departure of her dear young lady.

Helen's ideas were too tumultuous for her to reflect one moment seriously on the strange events of the morning, till on her return to the Vicarage, she met Courtenay. The emotions which contended in his bosom were sufficiently evident; for a moment they flushed his pallid cheek with an appearance of health.

"Helen—my own Helen, it is now no crime to call you so," said he, in a hurried accent, "what is reserved for us?—may we not venture to hope?—Surely something more than the accidental occurrences of life is visible. We will not despond; the same hand that has, so unexpectedly, rescued me from perjury, may still bless us. Imagination has already been busy. I must instantly procure some employment; and who knows but I may still, by application, procure sufficient to
put

put me in possession of the dearest treasure on earth."

His emaciated frame, and the weakness which even the slight exercise he was now using, sufficiently evinced, drew a sorrowful sigh from the heart of Helen.

"You cannot endure much exertion now, Courtenay," she replied; "we must therefore, for the present, attend wholly to your health. The removal of that heavy load of sorrow, that has so long oppressed you, will, I doubt not, tend greatly to its restoration; and when this happy effect is produced, you may think of application to business. But come, you shall accompany me to Mr. Mallett's; he has, I doubt not, heard the interesting intelligence, and will decide on some plan for us."

Courtenay readily acquiesced with this proposal, and they slowly proceeded to the Vicarage, where they found old Courtenay, lamenting his evil destiny to Mr. Mallett.

"Oh, Percival, Percival," he exclaimed,

on seeing his son, "what will become of me? I am ruined past redemption!—The law will be put in force against me, and I shall end my wretched days in prison, for I have no means of paying the sum of five thousand pounds, which I appropriated to your service, when you quitted England, from Miss Cremur's fortune. I don't deserve much tenderness from you, Percival, I know I don't; but you were always a good boy, and I hoped would have extricated me from this difficulty, especially as the debt was incurred on your account."

"Is it possible," asked Mr. Mallett, "that Percival's equipment could have cost five thousand pounds?"

Percival, who well knew that the sum had not been expended on him, but who apprehended that his father would descend to a falsehood to support his assertion, prevented his answering, by saying—"It is now of no importance how the money has been bestowed; my father is Miss Cremur's debtor, and I am responsible to him

him for the amount, which how to procure I know not. But how could the event, which has now taken place be prevented, when it was never foreseen, nor even suspected?"

"Had not you been such a poor chicken-hearted fellow," said his father, "when you went to church to be married to Miss Cremur, all these evils might have been prevented."

"If the repugnant feelings that subdued Percival's fortitude, when he had resolved to make so severe, so noble a sacrifice, be an imperfection of nature," said Mr. Mallett, "what sentiments can actuate the heart to reprove so amiable a weakness?"

"You are severe upon me, Mr. Mallett," replied Mr. Courtenay; "I know you love Percival, and he deserves your partiality, for he is a worthy young fellow, and merits a better fate; but what can his poor old father do? destitute, helpless, and in danger of ending his days in prison! —I am sure I have a proper paternal affec-

tion for my son, but self-preservation is, after all, the first law of nature. Could I devise any means to cancel this debt, I am sure I should wish him very happy, and would readily give my consent to his marrying Miss Coleby; but what is to be done? we are all poor, and it would be worse than madness to form such an union."

Percival looked sorrowfully on Helen, while a deep sigh escaped him; it was too much for her feelings, and to conceal her emotions she left the room, and walked slowly to the arbour, at the head of the orchard, in which she flung herself, and indulged the tide of sorrow that pressed so heavily on her heart. The disorder that so evidently ravaged Percival's constitution recurred to her recollection with its fullest force, and she exclaimed with bitter agony—"No, I never can be his; he is rapidly approaching the period of all mortal sorrows, and I shall be left in this vale of misery to deplore his loss!"

A half-

A half-suppressed groan at that moment engaged her attention, and she was shocked to perceive that Courtenay had heard her soliloquy. A tear silently rolled down his cheek ; he sat down by her, and taking her hand, he said—" I had anticipated a different scene, my Helen, when I heard of Miss Cremur's elopement. On this hallowed spot," proceeded he, looking at the almost illegible inscription on the wall, " I hoped to renew my vows of constancy to her, who since the moment when those lines were written, has alone possessed my heart ; but that amiable friend, whose society I hoped would in this world reward my sorrows, teaches me a better lesson— she teaches me to anticipate an intercourse in happier regions. Never till this moment have I been sensible of my danger ; you have now convinced me of the futility of my earthly hopes. If then my doom is sealed, let me employ the intermediate time in endeavours to fortify my Helen to support the event with firmness."

Helen, painfully sensible of her indiscretion, in thus unguardedly discovering to him the stroke of impending fate, which he had not till then suspected; vainly strove for words to comfort him—they died on her lips, and she remained in silent anguish, till the presence of Mr. Mallett in some degree relieved her distress.

The chaise now waited to convey her to her sister; she therefore prepared for her departure. Her farewell to Mr. Mallett was affectionate; but when Courtenay silently kissed her, and led her to the chaise, her emotions were perfectly indescribable.—“Is not this a final adieu?” her eyes seemed to ask, when they turned towards him. He understood their expression, and brushing off a tear that stole down his cheek, he requested her to renew their correspondence.—“As a friend, Helen, you will not refuse me this indulgence,” he added.

Helen readily acquiesced; to leave him in his present state of debility, without
the

the chance of hearing whether his health amended or declined, was an idea most cruelly painful, and she rejoiced that he had proposed addressing her. As the chaise drove from the door, her eyes strained to take a last view of her beloved friend; nor could one external object recal her from the state of abstraction into which she sunk, at leaving the much-loved spot, till she reached the habitation of her sister, whose woe-worn countenance excited her truest sympathy.

“My dearest Emily!” and “My beloved Helen!” was all that their feelings would permit them to express, at the first moment of their meeting. Mrs. Clements, however, soon recovered her composure, and she welcomed the beloved sister, from whom she had been so long separated, with the sincerest hospitality.—The patient acquiescence with which Mrs. Clemments had for so many years obeyed the will of her arbitrary husband, was now so far settled into habit, that it seemed to

have subdued all her natural propensities. She had been accustomed to submit, till she was scarcely sensible of an independant idea ; and Helen was not long in discovering that she was governed entirely by her daughter.

Mr. Clemments had, by his miserly conduct, amassed a large fortune, which, exclusive of a handsome annuity reserved for his wife, the young Emily was to possess, without restriction, when she came of age. Her father had grudged the expence of a genteel education, and she being a high-spirited girl, whose mind was wholly unformed, had long governed the family, (her father excepted) with despotic sway. Her mother had superficially taught her English grammar, and the French language ; but so totally unequal was Mrs. Clemments to exercising a proper authority over her, that she never learnt more than her vivacious and childish imagination considered agreeable. Her disposition was naturally good, but Helen had been some
time

time an inmate in the family, before she discovered her real merit. Helen at first beheld her with an emotion of pity and concern; but at length she made some progress in her aunt's affection, who perceived, that though habitually self-willed, she possessed no natural obstinacy; and anxiously wishing to set on foot a plan of reformation, she proposed taking her entirely under her own tuition, to which proposal Mrs. Clemments readily consented. She believed her sister well qualified for the important task; she therefore disclaimed all interference, and promised to turn a deaf ear to every complaint which Emily might make against her aunt's discipline.

The confinement and fag of almost constant application to some useful branch of learning, was at first extremely irksome to Emily; but when she found that complaints to her too-indulgent mother were no longer availing, and that she must either obey her aunt, or live in an almost total

state of seclusion from the family, she soon became docile, and, by the proficiency she made, evinced a greater quickness of parts than her aunt believed her possessed of.

Mrs. Clemments perceived with delight her daughter's progressive improvement, which perhaps contributed, more than any other cause, to banish an habitual gloom, that on Helen's first arrival hung perpetually on her countenance. So long had Mrs. Clemments been accustomed to pass her hours in almost entire taciturnity, that it seemed to have become a part of her real disposition, and so reserved did she appear to Helen, that had not the strongest ties of affection influenced her conduct, she might have been inclined to seek another residence. The house too was comfortless in the extreme, for Mr. Clemments had considered every article of furniture, beyond what absolute necessity required, luxury and extravagance; and Mrs. Clemments had been so long accus-
tomed

tomed to confine her wishes to her possessions, that she forgot the deficiency.—Helen, however, at length, by her affectionate and unremitting attentions, found the way to her heart, and mutual confidence endeared them to each other.—Helen was permitted to follow her own taste with respect to furnishing the house, which was soon rendered commodious and genteel.

Thus employed, the hours now passed swiftly. Helen sometimes heard from Courtenay, who constantly comforted her with the assurance that he was better; for though she feared entirely to credit his assertion, her heart told her he would not deceive her. But though she was so much engaged with her sister and niece, she had not lost her partiality for solitude. There were moments when her heart sought to unburthen itself, and when the presence even of her dearest friends was obtrusive; and she would frequently calm her agitated spirits by wandering on the

banks of a river, overhung with woods, at a short distance from the town. The path seemed deserted by all but herself, and it was therefore her favourite haunt.

She wandered one evening further than was her usual custom ; but the weather was serene, and, unconscious of the progress of time, she ascended a hill, which commanded an extensive prospect of the adjacent country, which was highly picturesque. Helen professed not herself a poetess, but she had sometimes been induced to express the ideas with which nature's luxuriant scenery furnished her mind, in verse ; nor could she now resist inserting the following lines in her pocket-book :—

Bright orb of day, whose broad refulgent blaze
Behind yon western hill now slow declines,
Still o'er the skies, with crimson tinted rays,
Thy radiant influence through mild æther shines.

Sweet

Sweet ev'ning, welcome; o'er the thirsty lawn
Thy hov'ring mists in dewy show'rs diffuse ;
The weary world, from painful toil withdrawn,
Seeks thy calm hour, its mortal cares to lose.

Now o'er the sod with pensive steps I rove,
Where fond imagination loves to stray,
Where sense enraptur'd magic charms can prove,
While on the heart wild fancy's visions play.

What words can paint the highly-pictur'd scene ?
What glowing language nature's charms reveal,
Whose richest robe bedecks the sparkling green,
While circling woods the distant hills conceal ?

Through the lone vale yon river's crystal stream,
Slow and majestic marks his devious way,
Now lost its course—now seen a shadowy gleam,
Till shelving banks its surface wide display.

Adown the verdant plain, and woody dale,
See, interspers'd, the mud-built walls appear,
Skreen'd from the Summer's sun, the wintry gale,
Whose inmates poor, no dire assassin fear !

And

And yonder cot, whose modest roof retir'd,
Scarcely the penetrative eye can pierce—
Peaceful retreat! unenvy'd, unadmir'd,
Where dwell no rankling pride, no passions fierce.

Whilst here, in unison, the world's repose,
With sacred rapture fills my grate heart,
Feelings no languid utterance can disclose,
And souls congenial can alone impart.

Thus employed, the shades of night began to obscure the surrounding images, before Helen was aware how far she was from home. The moment the recollection recurred to her, she pursued the road that led towards the town. The moon had now arisen, and its meridian splendor was intercepted only at intervals by the pendent branches that overhung the pathway. How often had she felt the mild influence of a similar scene, heightened by the society of her dear unfortunate Courtenay!

—the

—the interchange of ideas was more extatic amidst nature's luxuriant scenery at such a moment, than language could express. Fondly, though painfully, did the retrospect of those blissful days press on her heart, when, untamed by present sorrow, and unsuspecting of future ill, the genuine effusions of innocent vivacity enlivened their conversations. Those moments were now flown on the wings of time, never—never to return !

The footsteps of a man following her disturbed the train of her reflections, and recalled to her mind the impropriety of her unseasonable ramble. She quickened her pace, but had proceeded but a short way, when the stranger overtook her, and enquired if he was then in the road that led to T——, from whence he had strolled, by way of killing time.

Helen was astonished at the sound of his voice, and on turning towards him, the moon distinctly delineated the features of Hartly. He was no less surprised; and the
moment

moment he made the discovery, exclaimed, with great apparent pleasure—"Is it possible!—am I really addressing Miss Coleby?"

Helen, who had not forgotten his recent contemptuous behaviour, replied coolly, that he was not mistaken.

"And will not Miss Coleby condescend to recognize her old friend, Hartly?" he added.

"Memory is not always sufficiently tenacious to retain the impression of those for whom we profess to feel a friendship, under every change of circumstance," she replied.

"This is an unkind retort, indeed," said he. "You allude to the constrained coldness I was condemned to practise towards you previous to my marriage. You are sufficiently aware of the narrowness of mind that actuates the conduct of my wife. The poor thing took a fancy to me, and it would have been barbarous not to have accepted her offered affections; and indeed,

deed, after my breach with Lady Elvira, and my still more severe disappointment respecting you, my beloved Helen, I cared not much what became of me; and I thought, if I did sacrifice myself, it would be prudent to offer my vows at the shrine of Plutus, particularly as the penalty was only to keep on terms of civility with a dear silly creature, who mistook vanity for love in her own tender composition, and whose happiness and good opinion could always be purchased with a set of new ribbons, or some other trifling gewgaw. I speak to you in confidence, Miss Coleby; I am sufficiently convinced of your discretion, and you know enough of my fair bride, to admit the justice of my description."

"Insult not justice with such unhallowed lips," Helen answered; "I wish for no apologies respecting your behaviour to myself; and if I did, can you believe I would accept them at your wife's expense? Whatever may have been my
opinion

opinion of Miss Cremur, I regret sincerely the lot to which she has condemned herself—a severer one than that of spending her life with an unprincipled libertine, she could not have chosen.”

“Take care, He'en,” he retorted; “I may avenge myself for this contemptuous treatment.”

Helen now indeed began to tremble; still far from home, and in the power of a man, avowedly devoid of principle, prudence whispered that she had been to blame in using such acrimonious expressions, and the language with which he now began to insult her confirmed her fears. Silently she for some time continued to proceed. This contemptuous treatment provoked him to such a degree, that he at length rudely seized her, and embracing her with violence, exclaimed—“By G—d this is too much; you add contempt to insult, and I will be revenged in the way most agreeable to my inclinations.”

Helen

Helen loudly screamed, and struggled violently to regain her liberty; but he was too strong to be resisted, and she began to supplicate his compassion, when the sound of approaching footsteps obliged him to quit her; and as he had no wish to measure swords or cudgels with an antagonist, for that such he should find every man of common humanity, he entertained no doubt, he declined the rencounter by a precipitate departure.

“Protect!—save me if you are a human being!” Helen loudly vociferated.

Her voice produced an exclamation of—
“Good Heavens! Miss Coleby, alone and in distress, at such an hour, and in such a place!”

He flew immediately to support her, and Helen was sincerely rejoiced to find herself accosted by Mr. Lifford. Some minutes elapsed before she could recover her composure sufficiently to thank him.—When her terror had a little subsided, she however related to him the circumstance
that

that had given Hartly an opportunity of insulting her. Lifford's unexpected appearance likewise required an explanation; and he accounted for it by telling her that he had accompanied Mrs. and Miss Elton to T——, who anxiously wished to see her, and who had determined on the plan of surprising her with an unexpected visit, which they flattered themselves would afford her real pleasure.

They reached the town that evening, and immediately sent to inform Helen of their arrival; and they were not a little disappointed at learning that she was from home. Despairing of the pleasure of seeing her that evening, therefore, Lifford had wandered to the banks of the river, and had been induced, by the mild serenity of the weather, to pursue his walk so far.

Helen sincerely rejoiced at the prospect of embracing her beloved friends, and for a moment forgot the surmises which Lifford might naturally encourage respecting the

the situation in which he had discovered her. The conviction of impropriety in wandering so far from home at so late an hour, however, soon recurred, and forcibly struck her mind; it caused a degree of restraint which she had never before experienced in Lifford's company.

CHAP. IX.

"The honey-moon is scarce declin'd,
But all the honey of their mind
Is gone, and leaves the sting behind."

BODSLEY'S COLLECTION.

TRULY affectionate was the meeting between Helen and her friends, the Eltons. The perilous situation from which Lifford had rescued her was recounted. Maria certainly rejoiced at her friend's escape; but she could not help remarking with a sigh, that Helen had been peculiarly fortunate in meeting with so gallant a protector as Mr. George Lifford.

Helen looked at her with mournful sympathy, and beheld her cheeks suffused with

a crimson die. "Maria's unfortunate partiality for Lifford still exists, then," thought Helen, with an emotion of sincere regret.

Lifford had a friend in the town of T——, whom he had long promised to visit; he had therefore embraced this opportunity of fulfilling his engagement, for the pleasure of accompanying Mrs. and Miss Elton.

The circumstance was hostile to Maria's peace; vainly had she flattered herself that she was the inducement to his journey.—Helen's presence in ten minutes convinced her that a stronger magnetic power had attracted him; and though before she left Lemonbrook, she had believed herself effectually cured of her unfortunate predilection, the pain she now experienced convinced her the wound had been but imperfectly healed.

Helen, who knew her friends would be truly welcome to Mrs. Clemments, prevailed on them to promise that they would become her guests the following day, when
Lifford

Lifford proposed paying his respects to the gentleman to whom his visit was intended ; which arrangement being settled, and an invitation sent to Mrs. Clemments, Helen consented to spend the evening at the inn.

Maria had a thousand things to say to her friend, and in cheerful converse passed great part of the evening ; the only interruption to their enjoyment was a noisy party in the next room, whose clamour sometimes quite drowned their voices, and at length became so tumultuous, as to convince them that a quarrel had succeeded the boisterous mirth which at first assailed their ears.

They had scarcely time to comment on the strange assemblage of sounds that now poured on them, when the door burst open, and two terrified females sought shelter from the impending storm. To the astonishment of Helen, she beheld in them the persons of the two brides, Mrs. Hartly and Mrs. Burnby.

An equal portion of surprise was visible
in

in their features at this unexpected recognition.

“Can it be possible!” Harriet exclaimed. “Are we really soliciting protection of Miss Coleby and her friends?”

Sophia sunk on a chair, wholly unable to speak; and Harriet’s eyes were instantly suffused in tears.

Lifford, to whom the scene was wholly inexplicable, flew immediately to the apartment from whence the ladies proceeded, to enquire the particulars of the affray, where he found the two bridegrooms quarrelling on the subject of precedence. Hartly rested his claims to importance on his great connections, and the rank he had always held in society; while Burnby boasted of his immense possessions, which Hartly told him, he believed, lay in the land of promise. This raised the ire of the offended hero, who used such tart language as was immediately reciprocated with interest. From words they at length proceeded to blows, which sent the ladies shrieking from

the scene of action. Burnby had hit his adversary a violent blow across the nose, who was preparing to return it when Lifford entered the room. His presence had the apparent effect of petrification on the astonished Burnby; his high-sounding words were suddenly arrested, and he stood like a culprit expecting sentence from his judge.

"Do my eyes deceive me!" exclaimed Lifford, not less astonished than the immoveable statue before him; "or do I really behold my old servant in the person of this gentleman, into whose presence I have so rudely intruded myself?"

The contempt which Hartly before felt was now increased to its fullest extent.

"I applaud that fertile genius," said he, "that could furnish your imagination with such brilliant images; to enumerate its vast possessions far exceeds the extent of my poor abilities. A town and country house, the latter situated in Airshire, surrounded by an immense park, containing a pond plentifully stocked with gold and silver fish,

fish, are, however, pretty conceits that still rest on my recollection. I thank you, Sir, for the alluring bait you offered me; but the waters are now become too clear for it to take effect. Your hundred acres of arable land, and the excellent breed of cattle grazing the surface, produce a fine prospect in the distance; we will say nothing of the barren heaths, that now, rather mal-a-propos, rise above this highly-cultivated estate, and obscure the view; the half-yearly sum of two thousand pounds, arising from funded property, may be easily deposited in a side-pocket of the imagination."

Burnby, who could not recollect a syllable to defend himself, or to deceive his late master, slunk quietly out of the room, and left Hartly master of the field. To the latter devolved the office of communicating the intelligence so lately received to the unfortunate Mrs. Burnby: to those possessed of sensibility the task might have been irksome; but Hartly (since no advan-

tage was likely to accrue from such a deception, felt no inclination to play the hypocrite on the subject of refinement. He, therefore, abruptly repeated to the weeping Harriet, the mortifying degradation of her husband, a finer subject to display the delicacy of whose feelings could not have occurred; she hid her tearful eyes in the bosom of her beloved Sophia, whose heart, however, felt no sympathetic emotions.

“ I am sorry for your misfortune, Harriet,” said she, in a tone of the most frigid indifference; “ but it is no more than Mr. Hartly and myself have, from the very first commencement of your acquaintance, expected; indeed, long before you were married, we had some very substantial reasons for believing him an impostor.”

“ And could you, the dearest friend I have on earth,” asked Harriet, “ suffer me to fall into a snare, prepared for my destruction, without one warning hint? Was this

this affection? Indeed; indeed, Sophia, I would not have served you so cruelly!"

"Why, my dear," answered Sophia, "I saw how violently you were in love with him, and I thought admonitions would answer very little purpose: besides, I feared that if you were really prevailed on to reject his offer, it might have induced you, by way of retaliation, to publish my intended elopement with Mr. Hartly; and I knew your mother sufficiently to be aware that if the least intimation of my design should be communicated to her, she would leave no means untried to frustrate it; and surely you cannot blame me for thinking of myself before I benefited my friends?"

Harriet immediately dried her tears, and in an emphatic tone repeated these lines:

Thus drives self-love, thro' just and thro' unjust,
To one man's power, ambition, lucre, lust.

"Miss Coleby," she added, "how can you look thus compassionately on the
1 3 wretch

wretch that has so deeply injured you? Oh that I had, unbiassed by prejudice, sought your friendship and counsel, how different would my pursuits then have been!"

Helen truly sympathized in Mrs. Burnby's distress, notwithstanding the rancour with which she had heretofore been persecuted by her; and she strove, by every means in her power, to alleviate its poignancy; she besought the compassion of her sister and Mrs. Elton; and they were induced by her intreaties to promise their assistance in extricating the unfortunate sufferer from her truly deplorable situation.

The circumstances that led to this scene were well known to the whole party, who warmly applauded Helen's generosity. It increased Lifford's admiration to a dangerous extreme; and Maria heaved a sigh of pleasure, half mingled with regret, when she thought on the effect it would produce on his heart: they all, however, united
their

their endeavours to console the sorrowing Harriet. Mrs. Clemments offered her an apartment in her house, till her mother could be prevailed on to receive her, which she gratefully accepted; and Sophia, sincerely rejoiced to be so effectually relieved from a troublesome guest, who, she confessed, had some claim to her friendship, congratulated her on the acquisition of her new friends with the most frigid indifference, wished her coldly good night, and departed, accompanied by her husband. It was proposed that Mrs. Elton should, the following day, address a letter to Mrs. Ashton, in behalf of her repentant and afflicted daughter. Helen felt, that to have taken this task on herself, would have the appearance of exulting in her distress; she thought too it might be less likely to produce the desired effect than if offered by a stranger.

Mrs. and Miss Elton fulfilled their engagement to become Mrs. Clemments' guests the succeeding day; and Lifford became an

inmate in the house of the friend to whom his visit was intended. Mrs. Elton neglected not her promise to Mrs. Burnby; she wrote to Mrs. Ashton, representing in strong terms the distressed situation of her daughter. Respecting the effect it might produce on the marble heart of her mother, Harriet entertained a thousand fears; she too well knew her pride and revengeful disposition, to be sanguine in her hopes of success; and Helen, though she strove to comfort her, internally acknowledged the justice of her apprehensions.

Mrs. Hartly, who thought that a farewell visit to her friend would be polite, called at Mrs. Clemments's the morning before she quitted T——, and was immediately shewn into the parlour, where she found the whole party assembled. As her visit was intended to express condolence, she considered it necessary to touch on the subject; and the compliments of salutation had been scarcely exchanged before she abruptly said, "I am sorry for your misfortune, my dear Harriet; indeed,

indeed, I wish you had not been so precipitate; but to be sure, you have no one to blame but yourself. I hope your mother will receive you; though I must own I rather doubt it; for you know she has just cause to be very angry. Thank God, I had no parents to consult, so that my conscience is perfectly clear on that head: but indeed the difference in the connexions we have formed is so very striking, that I should stand acquitted before any parental tribunal. I hope, Harriet, although you have made no provision for yourself, that your husband will not absolutely take your whole fortune; for your mother has often told me that her income is very limited, independent of your's; and if you should be obliged to give up all you possess to such a mean wretch, how very hard it will be on her to maintain you on her small means.— I really pity you, my dear, very much, and wish I could do something to relieve you; but you know I am now entirely dependent on my husband, who, even before this dis-

covery, expressed his disapprobation of your conduct."

"Compassion such as your's, Mrs. Hartly," said Mrs. Elton, "must indisputably prove a sweet cordial to the afflicted heart; let me, however, warn you, that the censure you now so liberally bestow, may one day be recriminated. Those who, in the sunshine of prosperity, can so unfeelingly exult over the distressed (who, though more unfortunate, have been but equally culpable with the reprover), will surely have their reward."

"Dear, what have I said that can be disagreeable?" asked she; "I am sure I did not mean any unkindness—I have only spoken my sentiments, and I do not see why I should be afraid to do that in any company."

"Those sentiments that only betray a depravity of heart, might, with decency, be suppressed," answered Mrs. Elton. "I have yet met with few who made their boast of a hardened disposition, which convinces

vinces us that amiable propensities are sufficiently revered, even by those who possess them not, to excite a wish, at least, for the reputation."

Mrs. Hartly, though she did not fully comprehend the whole of Mrs. Elton's remarks, was convinced she had been very rudely treated; she arose to depart, though not without remarking, that the next time she exerted herself to perform a friendly action, it should be received with more gratitude.

Harriet was too much distressed to attempt answering; but her countenance expressed her gratitude to Mrs. Elton.

Lifford, though he was nominally the visitor of Mr. Serwent, spent almost the whole of his time at Mrs. Clemments's; and though Helen studiously avoided an exclusive conversation with him, he one day surprised her unexpectedly, when he renewed the subject that he had introduced while she was Mr. Mallett's guest, respecting his partiality for her. With her former
16. firmness,

firmness, she declared her inability to accept him.

"I am, then, most peculiarly unfortunate," said he; "you are the only woman on earth to whom I ever felt an attachment, and I believe you have seen sufficient of my disposition to know that pliability is not its prevailing trait. I have therefore no chance of solacing myself for the loss of one beloved object, by transferring my affections to another; my lot, therefore, you have positively decided: and since I shall ever prefer your friendship to the warmest sentiment of regard from any other woman, I trust you will not withhold from me the treasure I so highly prize."

"Do not form a hasty decision," said Helen, "which, if I am to believe what you say, disappointment may at this moment dictate, and which, in a *cooler* hour, sober judgment will condemn. Suppose it were possible that chance should throw in your way an amiable young woman, whose

whose heart was, unwillingly, your captive, and who had, without even the hope of a return, and before she was sufficiently aware of the danger to suppress it, centred her prospects of happiness in you."

"I cannot believe any female breast, in which I could wish to inspire a congenial sentiment, weak enough to center its prospects of happiness on so fragile a foundation," he replied. "I know not indeed what inference you would have me draw from your hint, but so little do I wish to possess the affection of any woman on earth, except yourself, that I have no inclination to believe such a circumstance possible. Consult your own heart, and tell me whether, when it is wholly occupied by one dear object, you think it possible for the partiality of another to create an interest sufficiently strong to obliterate that first impression?"

Helen would have answered that gratitude might effect such a change, had not
her

Her feelings so powerfully contradicted the assertion. The question related so exactly to her own situation, that she durst not venture to answer it at all.

The situation of Mrs. Burnby strongly interested the whole circle with whom she, for the present, resided. Her husband had written, to request her to return to him, assuring her that if she would comply with his wishes, he would treat her with the greatest kindness; but that if she continued to resist his importunities, he should put the law in force, and take possession of her fortune, allowing her only a limited income.

An epistle so discordant to every sentiment that filled the romantic heart of Harriet, excited the most poignant distress.

Never, till now, had she, for a moment, lost the darling hope of reposing on a sympathising breast, that could understand and participate in all her finely-imagined feelings. Innumerable were the ideal fabrics

bricks of felicity which fancy had erected on this subject; and in Burnby she had fondly believed all her hopes realized.—How cruelly, then, were her prospects blasted, when she found herself united to a wretch, whose low extraction was the least of his faults!—He had most villanously deceived her, and now added to the injury, by his mean-spirited threats to seize her fortune, as if he considered such paltry trash a compensation for the loss of her affection.

To associate with such an insensible brute, was absolutely impossible; and in a state of the greatest anxiety, she awaited her mother's answer to Mrs. Elton's letter. It at length arrived; and she perused the following contents.

“MRS. BURNBY,

“After the prudent step
you have taken, you had, no doubt, every
3 reason:

reason to expect re-admittance to my house. I am your mother, 'tis true, and most sincerely do I wish I could resign the tie; for as to my retaining the least grain of affection for you, you have reckoned without your host if you expect it. You are now no more to me than your hopeful husband; and I sincerely hope and pray that you may be miserable together.

“After your little inheritance is spent, you may both go to service; and perhaps your loving spouse may make interest for you at one of the places from which he has been formerly discarded. You have reduced me to beggary—but I scorn to complain to such a monster of ingratitude.

“SARAH ASHTON.”

Unfeeling as Helen had ever believed Mrs. Ashton, she could not have conceived any

any human being so totally devoid of natural feelings as to insult an only child's distress with such acrimonious language.

"What will become of me?" exclaimed the sobbing Harriet, while she hid her aching temples in Helen's bosom, after the perusal of her mother's inhuman epistle.

"Do not give way to this despondency," said Helen; "you are now with friends, who will not desert you, and who will adopt some plan to render you independent of both your husband and mother; the former will be obliged to contribute to your support, and we must endeavour to procure a situation for you where you can assist yourself."

Helen, though she strove to console Mrs. Burnby with cheering prospects of the future, remembered, with regret, the obstacles that had ever withheld Mr. Mallett from suffering her to eat the bread of industry when her circumstances were, in
some

some respects, similar. Her condolence was, for the present, entirely lost on Mrs. Burnby, whose sorrow seemed so entirely puerile, that Helen at length left her to herself, till the first paroxysm of her grief had subsided.

In the course of a few hours she however returned to her, and was surprised to find her employed in writing. Not doubting but that she was endeavouring to deprecate her mother's wrath, by a humble and pathetic description of her misery, she was beginning to dissuade her from the unsuccessful attempt, when Harriet put into her hand the following lines, which she declared the distress of the present moment had dictated :—

Oh, can the fond maternal breast

Her lovelorn child despise ?

Oh, take me home, and let me rest

Under a parent's eyes.

Helen

Helen loved not to give pain, and to have added to Mrs. Burnby's at the present moment would have been savage; otherwise she would have freely declared her entire disapprobation of so unprofitable an employment; she, however, returned the lines with great gravity, and without a single remark.

Helen, among other plans, which, with her friends, she had concerted for Mrs. Burnby's future support, had suggested a boarding-school; for which purpose, could any substantial hopes be encouraged of its success, Mr. Lifford, Mrs. Elton, and Mrs. Clemments, had declared their readiness to supply a sufficient sum of money, which proposed scheme Helen now repeated to Harriet.

No occupation could be more congenial to the romantic imagination of the latter.

"Delightful task, to rear the tender thought;
To teach the young idea how to shoot!"

In

In one minute, fifty systems of education crossed her mind; and she would have essayed at declaring her opinion on the subject in verse, had not Helen's mortifying silence respecting her recent composition, led her to suspect that its merit was not altogether so conspicuous as she had flattered herself.

CHAP. X.

"The virgin gave for her request,
The god that sits at marriage feast.
He, at their invoking, came,
But with a scarce well-lighted flame ;
And in his garland, as he stood,
Ye might discern the cypress bud."

MILTON.

JEFFORD, who warmly interested himself in Mrs. Burnby's behalf, found convenient excuses for calling at Mrs. Clements's; and when in Helen's presence, to her was all his homage paid. She was consulted on every occasion, and to her eyes turned for approbation.

Maria

Maria endeavoured to behold this visible preference with indifference; that deeply-rooted attachment, which she had so often believed subdued, was ever ready to break out afresh, and convince her of the imbecility of her nature.

The time now arrived for Mrs. Elton's departure. Lifford felt a degree of sorrow at the prospect of bidding Helen adieu; which no efforts could suppress. With his friend he spent the last evening of his stay at Mrs. Clemments's.

No one appeared in good spirits—the approaching separation between Helen and Maria was anticipated by both with real concern; and Lifford was going to leave the only female who had ever awakened the passion of love in his breast.

Helen's anxiety respecting Courtenay's health had been long excited by his silence, and now added to the depression on her spirits. Perhaps he was too ill to write: as this idea forcibly presented itself, a tear stole down her cheek.

Lifford

Lifford observed it with emotion.— Could he but inspire such an interest in her heart, what happiness would be in store for him !—Helen, shrinking from observation, left the room ; as she passed through the hall, a servant gave her a note, which, he said, had just been sent from the inn.— The direction was Courtenay's writing ; she immediately retired to her room, and read the following lines :—

“ Propitious fortune at length crowns our hopes, my angelic friend ; my relation, who died at Bengal, left a will in my favour, which was accidentally detained ; it has, however, now reached me, properly executed, and declares me possessor of twenty thousand pounds, safely deposited in the English funds ; it is sufficient, my Helen, to render us all happy. I am not well, and therefore cannot

cannot see you to-night; but I am much too happy to fear the continuance of my complaints."

Astonishment for a moment suspended Helen's thinking powers. Courtenay restored to her!—Was it possible?—Was she indeed awake?—or was the transporting change only a chimera of the imagination?—It was long before she could methodise her ideas; at length she re-perused the note, when its conclusion struck her:—"He is ill," thought she; "oh, he must be very ill, or he would have come to me, instead of writing."

This conviction counteracted all the pleasing anticipations that she had begun to indulge.

Maria, who had seen the emotion which drove her from the company, now followed her. She was shocked at the distress which, for some time, Helen was unable to explain;

plain; she however gave her the note, which Maria read with scarcely less surprise than her friend. "Your prospects are cheering, my dear Helen," said she, affectionately embracing her; "do not fear the effect of his illness—you can now nurse him; and surely your attentive tenderness will greatly assist his recovery.—But should we not send to enquire for him?—perhaps—I dare say Mr. Lifford would go, were *you* to request it."

Helen did, indeed, most anxiously wish to hear, from an impartial person, the state of his health, but she could not persuade herself to enter on the subject to Lifford; she therefore declined the proposal. In her present state of painful suspense, she felt unequal to the task of returning to the company, and Maria was charged with her apologies, which were no sooner expressed than Lifford, whose disappointment was sufficiently apparent, pleaded his preparations for the ensuing journey as an excuse for retiring, and wished the com-

pany good night. An early hour was appointed for their departure; and Lifford was more than punctual, for he had spent above an hour in Mrs. Clemments's breakfast-parlour before the ladies appeared.

Helen had not slept, and her eyes were swollen. The sympathy her appearance excited in Lifford's breast was hostile to its repose.

"Are you not well?" he asked, while he respectfully took her hand.

"Not quite well," she replied; "I have had a severe head-ache, which prevented my sleeping."

"For your friends' sake be careful of your health," said he. "Oh, Miss Coleby, I plead for a dangerous indulgence, when I solicit your friendship, yet have I not resolution to resign the claim you once gave me to it."

"Indeed," Helen replied, "your wish for its continuance is highly gratifying to me."

A look, which Maria's scrutinizing eyes
correctly

correctly read, was his answer. "Happy, though unconscious Helen," thought she, "were but those expressive looks bestowed on me, how highly should I prize them!—but in her breast they create no interest."

Helen's regret for the departure of her friends was decreased by her anxiety for Courtenay, whose presence had little effect in dispelling the apprehensions that his note had occasioned. The pleasure, indeed, which, at their first interview, illumined his countenance, for a moment inspired the fond hope of his recovery; but the pleasing deception was of short continuance; one day was sufficient to convince her of his danger. The innate cheerfulness, however, which the present state of his mind produced, no fatal symptoms could depress. He was with his Helen, whose every action and look bespoke affectionate solicitude; that balm most consoling to the heart of sensibility, was now bestowed on him—Helen was his nurse; the effect of whose attentions those

who have felt the tenderest of all earthly attachments can alone appreciate.

No impediment now appeared to interrupt the performance of the marriage ceremony; and as it was the anxious wish of both to be united by their worthy friend, Mr. Mallett, Mrs. Clemments and her daughter consented to accompany them to Alvondown.

Mrs. Burnby, whose indolence and abstraction from every useful pursuit, soon convinced her friends that she was totally unqualified for the superintendence of a school, was requested to remain in Mrs. Clemments's house till some eligible situation could be procured for her; to which proposal she gratefully acceded.

The arrangements for their journey were speedily adjusted; and they proceeded towards the interesting village of Alvondown, where, on their arrival, they were received by Mr. Mallett with sincere and hearty congratulations.

Agnes was waiting at the Vicarage to receive

ceive her dear young ladies. Mrs. Clemments was sadly altered since she last saw her. "Alack-a-day, my poor Miss Emily," she exclaimed, "that I should live to see you so pale!—it would have broke poor master's heart, if he had been living. Oh, it was a luckless hour that brought Mr. Clemments to this place; but there, every dog has his day, as is the old saying, and now I hope you will be rewarded. But poor Mr. Percival looks a sickly bridegroom; I hope Miss Helen's nursing will recover him before he goes to church, that the ceremony may not be again frustrated."

"Hush, my good Agnes," he replied, while he shook hands with her; "we must not revert to past events, which can never be recollected but with pain."

"I am sure I wish I could forgot 'em," said she, "for then I might feel more pity for that wicked old wretch, Mrs. Ashton, who is now perishing with a cancer in her breast, and who, they say, has scarcely

any thing left to live upon, since Harriet married so hopefully."

"Can this be possible, Sir?" said H addressing Mr. Mallett.

"It is, indeed," he replied; "wretched woman has long, it seems, labouring under a complaint, supposed to be cancerous; and the violent agitation which was the effect of her daughter's elopement, has now brought it to such a state, as must, inevitably, sooner or later bring her to the grave: and to aggravate the distress that this miserable disease occasioned, she retains but a small yearly pension. Her husband, possessing but little feeling or affection, it should seem, for her, limited her income to a bare subsistence, while he bequeathed to his daughter the remainder of his possession as soon as she became of age. How laudable she has bestowed it, you are sufficiently aware; and her husband has, I find, saved the whole, and perhaps is now preparing to revel with it on some distant shore

the execution of which plan he was instigated by Mr. and Mrs. Hartly."

What various emotions did this account excite in the bosoms of Courtenay and Helen!—How were all the invidious plans of their enemies frustrated!—Where was the anticipated exultation of those once-prosperous rivals?—The reflections which this unlooked-for intelligence occasioned threw an unusual degree of seriousness into the conversation.

The lassitude that so evidently hung on the frame of Courtenay, the fatigue of his journey seemed to have encreased; and though he strove to conceal his indisposition, to Helen's watchful eye it was sufficiently apparent. He quitted the Vicarage at an early hour, and proceeded slowly towards his father's, where he meant to reside till the happy day that was to bestow on him the first of earthly blessings.

Helen arose early the following morning. Emily, who was generally her aunt's companion, followed her example: to

her, the scenery of this sweetly-sequestered spot was novel; and while Helen seated herself in the arbour at the head of the orchard, her youthful companion preferred exploring the adjoining fields; the innocent cheerfulness (as yet unchecked by misfortune) that illumined her countenance, brought to Helen's view the days of her own early felicity—of the time, when, like Emily, she sought pleasure in nature's simple scenes—when no spot was unexplored—no flower unexamined.

Courtenay, her youthful preceptor and friend, was then in the full possession of health; the ruddy glow that then animated his countenance, was at this moment present to her imagination. Oh, how different was the sickly tint which the hectic fever now, at times, occasioned!—how bitter was the comparison!—happiness and Courtenay were too widely severed, ever again to unite in this world; and to sooth his last moments was the only melancholy consolation left her.

With

With such gloomy reflections did she fill the interval of Emily's absence, who now came running to her with a beautiful little goldfinch, which having its wing disabled, ~~was~~ hopping on the ground, and which she had rescued from the jaws of a gluttonous cat that was pursuing it.

"Shall I not have a beautiful gilded cage to keep it in, my dear aunt?" said she, while she presented the little trembling captive.

"You will not wish to deprive it of liberty, I am assured, my dear," Helen answered, "when it is sufficiently recovered to return to its natural element; were such your resolution, I should regret your having saved it from the cat, since one moment of anguish is certainly preferable to a life of captivity."

Emily acknowledged the justice of her aunt's remark, and blushed to recollect that self-gratification had, for a moment, triumphed over her humanity; she however determined to atone for the error by

attention to the poor little sufferer, and a promise to restore it to liberty the moment it was capable of defending itself.

Breakfast awaited their return, and soon after it was removed, Courtenay entered, apparently much revived by a night's undisturbed repose; his spirits likewise seemed considerably better; and Helen readily acceded to the proposal of his going in pursuit of a lodging. It was the anxious wish of both to live at Alvondown, or in its neighbourhood; and till a more commodious residence offered, they proposed hiring a lodging in that sweet village.

Helen wished to make some particular enquiries into Mrs. Ashton's deplorable situation—not from curiosity, but a real wish to alleviate her sufferings. For her pecuniary inconveniences, whatever they might have been, had she retained her health, Helen would have felt no compassion; but the miserable disease which now laid her low, unalleviated by the commiserating attention of one friend, and without
out

out even the means of procuring the attendance that her situation demanded, appealed to her feelings in most forcible language: and forgetting all the rancour with which she had been persecuted by her, Helen most anxiously wished to administer consolation. How to befriend her, indeed, she knew not; for that she should not, on any terms, be a welcome visitor, she was well assured. Harriet, she thought, might now be very useful; but it was difficult to devise the means of conveying such a proposal to the vindictive mother. The conviction of her present danger might, indeed, soften her heart; but of this Helen thought it necessary to be convinced, before she ventured to intrude herself into her sight.

Courtenay returned before dinner, and told Helen that he had seen a lodging which he thought would suit them; and in the evening he prevailed on her to accompany him thither. It was the house in

which Lady Elvira Musgrove resided when she first discovered Helen, which circumstance failed not to excite a variety of emotions as she entered it.

When she approached the drawing-room window, from whence her figure first attracted the attention of her once-kind friend, the association of ideas that the well-known objects without occasioned, for some time entirely absorbed her attention. Often had she witnessed from thence the war of contending elements below ; the dread of her then-absent beloved Courtenay's being exposed to the danger of the storm, added to its awful sublimity. What a variety of circumstances had occurred since that time ! and though she was now comparatively happy, her prospects were far—far from cheering ; Courtenay would soon be lost to her for ever !

A tear that silently dropped at this conclusion, she attempted to conceal ; but a sigh, which recalled her attention to the

present scene, shewed her the object of her sympathy, who had been watching the variations of her countenance.

“Your tears, my beloved friend,” said he, “sooth, though they distress me; I am aware of the event that you so sorrowfully anticipate; but why will you obscure this transient gleam of sunshine with the prospect of succeeding clouds?—I am considerably better; your kind attention, my Helen, has already greatly improved my health; and if I credit the impression that dwells on my mind, I shall many years enjoy your society.”

Helen smiled with pleasure at this declaration—but her apprehensions were not so easily silenced; she too well knew that his was a disorder which always flattered the sufferer, and without the favourable opinion of some skilful medical man, she dared not encourage the hope which his words were calculated to inspire.

She readily acquiesced in his wish to secure the lodging: and as no obstacle now remained

remained to postpone the marriage ceremony, an early day was fixed. Mrs. Clements attended her sister to the altar, and old Mr. Courtenay officiated as father.— With the solemnity that the service required, Mr. Mallett performed the ceremony, and bestowed his beloved Helen on her now happy Courtenay.

Old Courtenay, who was assured of being amply provided for, now expressed as much pleasure at the disappointment of his former plan as he had before felt chagrin. He rejoiced to see Percival happy, since his interest no longer interfered with the event that rendered him so ; and as his son acceded to his request to spend a jovial day, he cared not much for the occasion.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

“ ————— Alas ! how quick
Treads woe in pleasure’s footsteps.”

KEATS.

IN the preparations necessary for this most eventful period of her life, Helen forgot not those whose distress claimed her compassion. She had written to Mrs. Ashton, to enquire if she could be, in any respect, serviceable to her, but had received no answer ; believing, however, that the consciousness of her former ill conduct might restrain Mrs. Ashton’s inclination to receive assistance, she determined

mined to make still greater overtures, for which purpose she called at the house.

A servant, whose appearance was far from prepossessing, received her, and to her enquiries for Mrs. Ashton, replied, that she was very ill. On hearing she was not confined, Helen requested the servant to announce her to her mistress, but she abruptly answered—"Oh, if you be Miss Coleby, I *needent* trouble Madam with no messages, for she said when I took her your letter, that you could only want to *sult* her, and she thought it was no time now, for you was in prosperity, and she in *varsity*, and she ordered me to say so to you, or any messenger you might send."

"Good God!" exclaimed Helen, "how little does she know my heart, if she can believe it capable of such pitiful revenge!—if you have any influence over her, pray induce her to believe that compassion for her deplorable situation is the only motive that brings me to her house."

"I will tell her what you say, Miss,"
answered

answered the woman, whose visage began to soften at the mildness of Helen's address, "and perhaps she may think better of it; but sure she is in a wretched pickle, and nothing is, much as it should be, about her; for indeed she is so helpless, that she should, by right, have somebody always tending of her, but she won't be at the expence; and here am I forced to act nurse, cook, and house-maid. I assure you, Miss, 'tis a very hard place of work, and I *shouldnt* stay if Madam could suit herself with another body; but I *hant* a got the heart to leave her quite by herself, *thof* she is sometimes so peevish that I threaten to go."

"Pray endeavour to bear with her infirmities," said Helen, "and make allowances for her sufferings, and perhaps you will not always be unrewarded."

To enforce her advice, she slid something into her hand, which greatly relaxed the stiffened features of the attendant; and
after

after many curtsies, and promises to be attentive to the invalid, Helen left her.

To her friends at home she repeated the ill success of her visit, and after due consideration, it was decided on, that Harriet should be sent for, and presented to her mother without any previous notice, when, if a latent spark of maternal affection lived in the breast of the latter, her unexpected appearance, under the present distressful circumstances of both, must rekindle it: a letter was therefore immediately dispatched.

Harriet was sitting in her own apartment, watching the sun's slow progress against the opposite wall, with a table before her, covered with scraps of poetry, which her unrelenting muse refused her assistance to finish, when the servant entered with Helen's letter. Its contents obliterated, for a moment, all her Parnasian flights; and she wept with unfeigned sorrow at the account of her mother's wretched state.

She

She immediately prepared for her departure, and arrived the second day at Alvondown, when she hastened to the house of her offended, but suffering parent.

Courtenay and Helen, who had promised to pay their earliest respects to their friends at Lemonbrook, departed for that place a few days after her arrival.

Mournful in the extreme was Mr. Mallett's adieu to Courtenay—a strong and sad presentiment that he should see him no more dwelt on his mind. The gloom which his countenance evinced seemed sympathetic; Courtenay alone was uninfected with its influence. He told his respected friend, that in the course of a month he hoped to return to Alvondown, and the real enjoyment of that tranquil happiness, which circumstances had almost persuaded him dwelt not in this world.

Mr. Mallett could with difficulty repress a tear when he pressed his feverish hand, and wished his predictions might be realized.

Mrs.

Mrs. Clemments and Emily accompanied them to T——, from whence, as Courtenay bore the fatigue of the journey better than could have been expected, they proceeded the following day.

They found their friends at Lemonbrook anxiously expecting their arrival. Maria flew to receive them, and welcomed them with the sincerest congratulations, in which she was joined by her mother.

Mrs. Elton beheld, with real pleasure, the alteration in her young friend's countenance; it betrayed, indeed, no sensations of tumultuous delight, but the impression of placid happiness, corrected by, and perfectly resigned to the assured uncertainty of sublunary joys.

Courtenay supported the journey so well, that Helen even ventured to cherish a faint hope of his recovery.

Miss Lifford, with her father, paid their early respects to the visitors; but George chose to make his congratulatory call alone some days after their arrival.

Towards

Towards the evening of a very hot day, which had driven the family to seek shade, and the cooling breeze, in an arbour formed by the umbrageous shelter of several sycamore trees, he arrived. The seat would not contain the whole party, and Helen, who chose to accommodate the rest, had strayed to a spot at some little distance, where she met him. He had been directed by the servants at Lemonbrook to the arbour where the party were assembled, and was proceeding towards it, when he accidentally met Helen.

She received him with the civility and friendship that his conduct towards her had ever merited; but an unconquerable degree of agitation was visible in his address to her, when he offered his congratulations on the interesting event that had brought her to Lemonbrook.

Helen endeavoured to relieve his embarrassment by entering on indifferent subjects, but without success; and she had turned to rejoin the party, before he had,
in

in any degree, recovered his composure; he then took her hand, and entreated her to stop one moment till he had recruited his nerves. "What opinion," said he, "will your husband form of me, should I greet him with the incoherent expressions with which I have accosted you? You are deservedly happy, Mrs. Courtenay, and I am ashamed of my weakness; you know the cause, and will make allowances for the emotion which this first interview has betrayed. My heart has always been considered as incapable of engendering the glowing embers that constitute the passion of love, as if it had been formed of materials possessing the properties of asbestos; but I now most painfully find that the repellant qualities which so long kept the enemy at bay, are entirely demolished, and that the flame rages with redoubled fury, and will, I fear, desolate the territory, before it will be possible to assuage its force."

"To prevent so entire a destruction," said Helen, with a smile, "I would recommend

mend to you to waft some of the fuel with which it is fed to your neighbour's premises. Perhaps the advice is malicious; but so frail is our nature, that I fear we too often derive consolation from congeniality of circumstances, even though they should be those of distress."

"I do not understand your meaning," said he, with quickness; "I am, however, assured that such a reciprocity would, in the present instance, fail of affording satisfaction. I cannot conceive affection to be transferable on the same principles with worldly property—at least I can aver that mine is not of so *pliant* a nature: we will therefore drop the subject, the impropriety of introducing which I am sufficiently conscious of."

Helen readily assented to this proposal, and they immediately returned to the arbour, where he congratulated Courtenay with all the composure he could assume.

Courtenay, who, as the sun declined, felt the cold air too powerful for his weak frame,

frame, soon proposed returning to the house.

Helen fancied he looked worse than usual; and her apprehensions were painfully confirmed, when, while they were at tea, a faintness quite overcame him. She had been anxiously watching him, and on the first discovery of his change of countenance, she ran to support him; he rested his head on her bosom, and after some minutes appeared to revive. A tear, which she could not restrain, wetted his cheek—"Helen," said he, while he pressed her hand to his lips, "you must acquire more fortitude, or I fear I shall often alarm you. I have long been subject to these fits of weakness; but they are of short continuance, and therefore you must not be concerned at their frequency."

He was, however, too ill to continue with the company, and with the assistance of Lifford and Helen, he retired to his apartment.

Lifford's looks were sufficiently sympathetic

thetic when he returned to the tea-table; on quitting it, Maria went to enquire for Courtenay, who was somewhat recovered, but too languid to return; and Maria, who perceived that conversation fatigued him, soon left the room.

In the hall, Lifford met her, and asked if she would not enjoy the cool fragrance of the evening, by taking a stroll into the park? Astonished at a request so unusual, she scarcely knew how to account for it, or to conjecture on what subject he wished to entertain her; she however accepted his invitation. He enquired for Courtenay with the most apparent solicitude; and as they pursued their walk, lamented, in feeling language, the mournful situation of her friend.

How strongly he was interested in her welfare, his conversation sufficiently evinced; and indeed he dwelt with such enthusiasm on her merits, as led Maria to fear that he had discovered her partiality for him, and was taking this method to con-

vince her how little hope she had of inspiring a mutual affection. Mortifying in the extreme was such a supposition to her feelings; and as she continued to indulge it, it threw such a degree of restraint over her manner, as to destroy all power of rendering herself agreeable, or even of contributing to support the conversation.

The sudden change in her behaviour was striking; but her companion could not divine the cause: he knew her too well to believe, for a moment, that envy at the eulogiums he had bestowed on her friend could occasion it; and respecting her favourable opinion of himself, vanity had never whispered such a suspicion. So circumstanced, neither was sorry to shorten the walk.

Courtenay, whose lassitude evidently increased, notwithstanding his wish to conceal it, was now the sole object of Helen's attention: she wished to return to Alvondown, while he retained sufficient strength to undertake the journey; and as he was
himself

himself anxious to revisit his native village, a day was immediately fixed for their departure.

It was now the middle of August, and the heat was too intense for the weakened frame of Courtenay to endure the fatigue of travelling in the middle of the day—the evening was therefore fixed on for the commencement of their journey.

Lifford, who almost feared that Courtenay's dissolution would take place during their journey home, and who dreaded the effect which such an event might produce on Helen, would have offered his services to accompany them, had not delicacy forbade the suggestion; a servant, therefore, whom Helen had taken with her from Alvondown, was their only companion.

With an aching heart, she exchanged the parting kiss with Mrs. and Miss Elton; Lifford, who was present, presumed not to follow the example of his female friends, but a fervent pressure of the hand which he gave her, and an expressive look of

L 2

sympathy,

sympathy, spoke his feelings. It was a silent adieu; not one of the circle left at Lemonbrook indulged the faintest hope of ever seeing Courtenay again, and tears were, for some time, the only language that spoke the congeniality of their sentiments, after the departure of their interesting friends.

Helen vainly endeavoured to conceal her emotions from the invalid—he read all their poignancy; but he could say little to console her, now too fully assured, from his internal feelings, that his days were numbered; he felt in its full force, the anguish that this awful separation would occasion; he, however, endeavoured to amuse his affectionate companion.

The evening was beautifully serene, and the cheerful melody of the birds announced the influence of the refreshing zephyr. The rural scenery which the country through which they passed exhibited, recalled to the minds of Courtenay and Helen a thousand interesting circumstances of their youthful

youthful days ; and during the pleasing relation of their congenial pursuits, the recollection proved a temporary alleviation of their sorrows.

They pursued their journey by such easy stages that they were several days on the road. As they drew near Alvondown, Helen, with a degree of anguish that she had scarcely before been conscious of, contrasted the present state of Courtenay's health with his imputed amendment when they left home ; a fallacious hope, which his obstinately alarming symptoms could not crush, then animated her heart ; the recollection of that hope, compared with the dreadful apprehensions that now filled her mind, added to their acuteness.

Mr. Mallett and old Agnes received them at their new residence with sincere affection. Courtenay, to whom the last day's journey had proved insupportably fatiguing, immediately retired to bed ; his nights were seldom refreshing, and he

awoke rather worse the following day. He forbore to complain ; but his pallid cheeks and sunk eyes, together with the cough that incessantly tormented him, revealed the secret to his watchful nurse, whose fortitude was now severely tried. It was incumbent on her to cheer and comfort his last moments, and to conceal in his presence the heavy despondency that oppressed her ; and to perform this duty, she exerted every power ; but there were moments when nature claimed her influence ; and she would leave the room to indulge the emotions that swelled her sad heart.

He was now become too weak to quit his apartment ; and even his unfeeling father, when he visited him the day after his return, was deeply affected. " My poor boy," said he, " who could have thought it would have come to this ?—I have been unworthy of such a treasure ; but if I could now resign my life to restore thy health, I would readily sacrifice it."

He

He felt too much to proceed ; and Helen, who feared the effect of such a scene, soon prevailed on him to withdraw.

Mr. Mallett, whose presence never failed of affording comfort, constantly visited them ; his conversation was a sure balm to the afflicted heart. Feelingly sensible of the distresses of his fellow-creatures, he sympathized with their sorrows, while he taught them to support their poignancy with firmness. Minds like Courtenay's and Helen's, it was no difficult task to impress deeply with the ever-animating hope of a blessed eternity ; and when Courtenay was led to contemplate his approaching dissolution with awful joy, Helen felt her hopes raised to such a pitch of enthusiasm, that she almost believed she could endure the separation without pain. " This is but a short passage to the regions of perfect bliss," she would think ; " and why should I indulge selfish sorrow for that fortunate passenger

whose race is run with honour, and who goes to receive an everlasting reward?"

But those moments of heroism were transient—for though religion taught her to submit to the decrees of Providence with resignation, she was conscious that while mortality was her portion, she must be alive to the feelings that it so naturally excited.

CHAP. XII.

“ Ah, now for comfort whither shall I go?

No more thy soothing voice my anguish cheers ;

Thy placid eyes with smiles no longer glow,

My hopes to cherish, and allay my fears :

’Tis meet that I should mourn—flow forth afresh my tears.”

BEATTIE.

MRS. Burnby was now an inmate of her mother’s mansion ; unexpectedly she reached Alvondown, and appeared before her indignant parent before the latter was aware of her intention. The rage which Mrs. Ashton would have expressed, was only restrained by her debility : but though it could not be declared in words, it was in

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actions

actions sufficiently evinced, for she continued many days obstinately silent. Conscientious, however, at length, that her dreadful complaint required more aid than interested attendants would bestow, she condescended to pour forth her abuse in such a torrent, that poor Harriet had well nigh sunk under its severity. Truly sensible of her misconduct, she however exerted her utmost fortitude to support the reproofs she so well deserved, and continued to perform every office of filial affection, notwithstanding the repulsive manner in which her attentions were received.

She called on Helen as soon as she heard of her return, and expressed her gratitude for her kindness.

Helen wished not to distress Mrs. Ashton by her presence, though she now contrived, through Mrs. Burnby's means, to supply her with every comfort that her miserable state demanded. To spare her feelings the mortification of knowing to whom she was obliged, Helen enjoined Mrs. Burnby to
secrecy ;

secrecy ; and her injunctions would have been obeyed, had not Mrs. Ashton, who knew how warmly she had interested herself in her daughter's behalf, solaced her sufferings by rancorous reflections on this kind friend.

Harriet, who felt all her irascible faculties awakened to an uncontrollable extreme at such ungrateful conduct, defended Helen with equal warmth ; and in the heat of resentment, declared most fully her mother's obligations to her generous friend.

The agony into which this intelligence threw Mrs. Ashton, threatened to prove fatal ; her passion defied all controul ; and the exertion reduced her to a state of debility that, for some hours, rendered her existence doubtful. The awful moment of her dissolution was not, however, arrived, and she recovered sufficient sensation to be wretchedly sensible of her danger and wickedness. Conscience, which had long been a burthensome inmate, now became insupportable ; and she would even have

consented to make concessions to those injured beings whom her malice had so indefatigably pursued, could she have been assured of their forgiveness. She had heard of Courtenay's alarming complaints, and the monitor within whispered her that she could never make atonement for the misery she had occasioned : she longed most anxiously for a conference with Mr. Mallett ; but believing it impossible for a mind to exist so totally unlike her own as to commiserate her present state of wretchedness, she had not courage to endure such a humiliation.

Helen's attention was now too painfully engrossed to permit her to think on indifferent subjects—Courtenay most rapidly declined, and was now become so weak, that though he continued to leave his bed, the exertion of removing to his chair nearly overcame him.

"The weather is unusually close, Helen," said he one evening, when he felt himself very ill ; " can you assist me to the window ?"

She

She complied with his request, and with great difficulty supported him across the room, when he sunk into his chair quite exhausted, and rested his head on her bosom.

"Helen," said he, "when he had in some degree recovered his breath, "what a painful task does affection impose on you!—my anxious prayer is granted—but for you what consolation will remain?—except, indeed, that sweetest comfort to a feeling mind, the conviction of soothing the last moments of your suffering friend with the balm of real sensibility. Oh, my beloved Helen, add still to the blessing you bestow, an assurance that you will sustain the approaching separation with firmness and resignation!—This is the only subject that now disturbs my mind, or keeps it still chained to this world. Every tie but affection for you is dissolved, and but for your misery, I could look forward with joy and confident hope to that blessed period when we shall meet in eternal happiness."

Her

Her sobs, which no efforts could restrain, interrupted him ; he feebly clasped her to his heart—but the exertion he had used had quite exhausted his strength, and he was unable to proceed. Helen, greatly alarmed, rung the bell for assistance.

Mr. Mallett was in the house, and soon followed the servant to Courtenay's apartment : he was shocked at the visible alteration of his countenance, and with agony Helen perceived his apprehensions. She immediately sent for the physician that had for some time attended Courtenay.

He was at home, and obeyed the summons ; but his opinion the moment he beheld his patient, was sufficiently visible.

" It is all over then," thought Helen, while she struggled violently with the anguish that swelled her heart.

The physician, who perceived that the last scene was rapidly closing, would have led her to another room ; but Courtenay still embraced her ; and his forehead, from which she now wiped the cold damps of death,

death, still rested on her bosom. A convulsive grasp was his last proof of sensation; in a moment his hand fell motionless from her's—and his features exhibited that awful change which could not be mistaken. Helen uttered a piercing shriek; the blow, though long expected, she was ill prepared so suddenly to sustain.

The physician carried her by force from the chamber of death. Mr. Mallett followed her, and as she sat on a sofa, apparently insensible to the anguish that awaited her, he placed himself by her side, and gently took her hand. She turned hastily to see who was near her; and after contemplating the mild benignity of Mr. Mallett's countenance a minute, she burst into an agony of tears: he rejoiced at the relief which nature thus found for her excess of misery; and for some time he encouraged the seasonable effusion. His advice to retire to bed she readily followed, for no object remained to interest her attention.

Mr. Mallett wrote immediately to Mrs.

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Clemments,

Clemments whose society he thought might afford some comfort to her afflicted sister.

Helen, after a wretched night, attempted to leave her bed—it was, however, but an attempt, for a faintness which wholly overcame her, obliged her again to rest her head on the pillow. An affectionate servant was now her only companion, but her feelings were, at this moment, too acutely wretched to wish for society. As the evening advanced, she recollected with renewed agony the scene she had witnessed the preceding day: a strong wish to visit the remains of her beloved Courtenay, induced her to exert the little strength she retained, to dress herself. She knew that Mr. Mallett had left the house; and well assured that he would object to such a scheme, she determined to embrace the moment of his absence.

Her servant, who attempted not to oppose her inclination, assisted her to the room, where the deepening shades of twilight added to the gloom of the silent apartment.

apartment. Near the window stood the chair on which Courtenay expired; she threw herself into it, and almost suffocated with convulsive sobs, leaned her head against the back that had so recently supported her dying friend.

It was long before she had resolution or strength to rise; at length, with faltering steps, she approached the bed of death—but oh, what a scene had she there to witness!—her amiable, dear, affectionate Courtenay, stretched insensible on the bier!—an unconscious lump of clay!—No language can pourtray her feelings—she sunk by his side!

Ever grateful for her slightest attentions, and tenderly participating in all her sorrows, he had now lost every power of sympathy!—She touched his cold hand—but the sensation shocked her; and she started from the bed, and kneeling by its side, hid her face in the counterpane.

At that moment the door opened, and old Courtenay advanced to the bed; he
drew

drew aside the curtain, and gazed on the pale face of his son some moments in silence. Mr. Mallett accompanied him.

“ My poor boy,” said the former, “ thou hast at last found refuge from thy oppressors, and left thy miserable old father to shed the tear of bitter repentance on thy grave. Ah! it should not have ended so, Mr. Mallett;—he was a noble, worthy young fellow: and had I but proved myself a parent, all might still have been well. The sum of our reckoning must one day appear; and wilt thou then become thy father’s accuser? No, pale as is that face now before me, and rendered ghastly pale by my wicked extravagance, thou art too noble to retaliate injury! But justice will be avenged; and where shall I then hide my wretched head? Oh that I had listened to Mr. Coleby!—but fate pursued me. Where is his poor wife? it is on her your compassion should be bestowed—I have no claim to it.”

A sob from Helen discovered her to Mr.
Mallett;

Mallet; he immediately assisted her to rise, and prevailed on her to leave the distressful scene. Her last wish, with respect to Courtenay, was now accomplished, and she followed his advice.

Another heavy night and day passed before Mrs. Clemments arrived. Helen was told she was come; but it was long before she could acquire resolution to see her. When she believed herself sufficiently fortified to support the interview, Mrs. Clemments was conducted to her apartment. Their meeting was affecting in the extreme. Mrs. Clemments attempted not to console the afflicted mourner; she well knew it was yet too soon to reason on her sorrow;—Nature maintained her right to pour forth the emotions of her heart in silent anguish. Mr. Mallett waited, anxiously, for that moment when the balm of consolation might be successfully administered. Preparations for the interment of Courtenay now engrossed his attention; the melancholy day on which his mortal remains were

were to mingle with their kindred dust, at length arrived.

Helen had made no enquiries, and they wished her to remain ignorant of the event; but the slow, heavy toll of the minute bell, which decency required, announced the fatal tidings. She started, and violently shuddered when the sound met her ear, and flinging her arms round Mrs. Clemments's neck, she sought in her bosom to lose the voice of the cruel monitor. Still, however, it continued to grate on her senses, till Mr. Mallett, who had hastened the melancholy procession, bade it cease.

For several hours Helen remained in a state of insensibility; but her watchful friends had, at length, the satisfaction of seeing her revive. The langour and illness which were, so naturally, the effect of her wretchedness, Mr. Mallett thought, might be sooner dissipated by a removal from the spot where she had witnessed the distressing scene; but for the present, she resolutely rejected such a plan. More than a
fort-

fortnight elapsed, after the interment of Courtenay, before she could acquire resolution to see Mr. Mallett, when, fearing he might impute her reluctance to ingratitude, she requested that he might be admitted. It was a mournful interview; the settled melancholy that her countenance evinced, gave to his sensibility a greater shock than he was even prepared to receive. He took the hand she offered him in silence; and while he stooped to kiss her cheek, a tear fell on it. His sympathy revived her more lively sorrow, which prevented conversation during his first visit. After it had been repeated, she, however, became more tranquil, and soon derived her largest portion of consolation from his society.

Emily Clemments, who had accompanied her mother to Alvondown, was now her aunt's constant, affectionate companion; and to her, in some degree, was Helen indebted for the resignation she acquired. She had long been considered, by her niece,
the

the most perfect of human beings, and an example, in every respect, worthy her imitation; for her sake, therefore, Helen felt it her duty to combat the imbecility which seemed to pervade her mind; and she, at length, acceded to Mr. Mallett's anxious wishes for her to visit the Vicarage; but when he found how severely painful was the recollection which every scene there excited, he almost repented having made it.

"Can you pardon my weakness, my dear Sir?" said she, when she had recovered in some degree her composure. "Indeed, I greatly fear this excess of grief is criminal: but it is a hard task to subdue the feelings, where they are so severely tried."

"My dear Helen," he replied, "so far from giving to your present conduct so harsh an appellation, my respect for the firmness and resignation with which you have supported this heavy stroke, can only be equalled by my sympathy for your sufferings. Nature asserts her full claim to our mortal feelings, and will not be cheated.

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That chain which links our affections on earth is necessary to our well-being ; nor can we be indifferent when it is broken.— We are not forbid to mourn the loss of our sublunary blessings, though we dare not arraign the decree that deprives us of them, since we know it to proceed from a good Providence, who ordereth all things for our ultimate benefit. You, my Helen, have understood this distinction—you now lament your separation from your dearest friend, but your sorrow is so tempered with submission to the will of your Creator, and the hope of future bliss, that though you weep, you are not miserable ; and when every object reminds you, that he with whom you were used to contemplate them with delight, has left this mortal scene, you are comforted with the cheering prospect of a re-union in happier regions—a hope that invigorates the mind, and ever secures it from the desolating influence of despair.”

“ Indeed you describe my feelings with
justice,

justice, Sir," Helen replied; "my sorrow is tempered with hope, and is far—far removed from that restless misery that murmurs at the rod with which it is chastened. It is a sorrow I would not exchange for all the unthinking mirth this world could bestow. Some author has ridiculed the idea of pleasing sorrow as absurdly romantic, and as finding no place in real life, but I feelingly contravert this opinion. When I contemplate the virtues of my dear departed friend, I am resigned to the loss that is so entirely selfish; and when I endeavour to govern every action of my life by the rules that I think he would have approved, I am consoled, and at least contented, if not happy."

Mr. Mallett expressed his high admiration of her sentiments; and thinking that sufficient had been said on the subject, he endeavoured to engage her attention on less afflictive topics: he told her of his interview with Mrs. Ashton, which had taken place at the latter's particular request.

Fully

Fully sensible of her danger, she had, for some time past, been most anxious to receive the forgiveness of Mr. Mallett, Courtenay, and Helen; her pride, however, prevented her expressing such a wish, till the death of Courtenay awfully reminded her of its futility.

She was greatly agitated when she received the account, and then, for the first time, expressed her solicitude to see the good man, whose mild benevolence was so universally revered.

Mr. Mallett waited not for a second mandate; the first intimation of her wishes sent him to her house, where the servant, who had been instructed to admit him, conducted him to her mistress's apartment. It was nearly dark; and as he entered the room with caution, he was not immediately perceived.

The first object that presented itself was Harriet, on her knees at a window-seat at the most distant part of the room, with a blank sheet of paper, and a pen and ink

before her. On a sofa near the fire, lay the emaciated figure of Mrs. Ashton, so altered that he was shocked at her appearance. She was groaning, apparently in great agony, and vainly soliciting the assistance of her daughter to change the painful position in which she lay.

Harriet, totally absorbed in the occupation most pleasing to her imagination, was deaf to her mother's importunities; and Mr. Mallett had listened to them some minutes before he was discovered. The sound of his voice, however, at length announced his arrival, and recalled Mrs. Burnby from the state of abstraction into which she appeared to have fallen, when, after paying the necessary compliments of salutation, and affording her mother the assistance that she had before solicited in vain, she withdrew.

Mr. Mallett then approached the sufferer, and taking her hand, enquired, in a voice of sympathy, how she found herself?

Her first emotions on beholding him were agonizing to an almost insupportable degree;

degree ; his soothing manner, however, in some degree, softened her anguish. It was long before she could speak to him ; at length, however, she recovered sufficient strength to deplore, in the most passionate terms, her own unworthiness.

“ I have rendered two amiable beings wretched,” said she, “ to gratify the envious spirit that nature implanted in me. One I have reduced to the grave—but where now is my triumph?—I am following him ; but oh, what a wretched contrast in our prospects!—Shall we be adjudged in another world, Mr. Mallett, according to our deserts?—and can resentments live beyond the grave?—if so, what must be my destiny?—I cannot bear the retrospect of my past life!—but why was it my misfortune to be born with such evil propensities, as no efforts of my own could ever correct?”

“ Pardon my interrupting you, Madam,” said Mr. Mallett ; “ but indeed I cannot silently listen to your unjust accusation

against the natural propensities of the human heart. That we are born with different dispositions, I readily admit; but I cannot be persuaded that strong passions exist in the mind of man, without a proportionate share of strong resolution to combat them, if we allow reason to assert her sway. It is the propensity we encourage that will either exalt or debase the heart; and if we allow our passions entire dominion, they must, ultimately, undermine our better principles, and destroy the means of enjoying that happiness of which we are ever in pursuit: but this is no time for argument—your sufferings, Madam, appear to be very severe; and the remorse you express must add to their acuteness. I will not attempt to console you with insincere professions—you are in full possession of my opinion respecting your past conduct; and I rejoice at the reproaches of conscience which you now feel—it assures me of your contrition.—Your request to see me is a further proof
of

of your sincerity ; I am come, therefore, to endeavour to speak peace to your afflicted spirit. If it can afford you any consolation to hear that Courtenay left the world resigned and happy, and that his Helen laments him only with that true Christian spirit which mourns, but murmurs not at the dispensations of Providence, that comfort may be yours in its fullest extent ; and let me likewise add, that as we are taught to believe repentance alone not sufficient expiation for great offences, we may hope your present sufferings will atone for your's."

"Could I hope so, Mr. Mallett," said she, "how patiently would I endure them !—but when I look back, what miserable reflections fill my mind, and torment my conscience !—Oh, how transitory—how ineffectual to their purpose, are all the plans we form, which relate only to the things of this world !—When I now recollect the motives that actuated my conduct, their weakness astonishes me. Could

but the fear of death be constantly before our eyes, how trifling would all earthly pursuits appear !”

“ It is certainly decreed, for wise purposes, that we do not foresee the time of this awful event,” answered Mr. Mallett ; “ for had we so gloomy a perspective always in view, it would relax that interest in worldly affairs which it is so necessary we should feel.”

“ Oh, Mr. Mallett,” she exclaimed, “ had I such a conscience as your’s, I should view the past and future, both with respect to this world and the next, with comfort and hope. Your life has been spent in administering to the necessities of your fellow-creatures—mine, in inflicting on them such wounds as death only could heal ; how can I endure the agonising comparison ?”

“ But we know that our Almighty Father is merciful,” said Mr. Mallett, “ and that he never rejects the prayer of the contrite.”

Mrs.

Mrs. Ashton felt somewhat consoled by this conversation, and after promising to repeat his visit soon, Mr. Mallett withdrew.

In the lobby, in a now almost darkened window, stood Harriet, with her still-unsullied paper before her, and the pen suspended in her hand.

"Mrs. Burnby," said he, provoked at finding her so employed, "your mother, I think, stands in need of your constant attention, and since her days are drawing rapidly to a conclusion, I should suppose those trifling occupations, which engross so much of your time, might, at least, give way to the more urgent ones that duty demands, for the short time that the sacrifice will be required from you."

"Indeed, Sir, I do not neglect my duty to my poor mother," she replied; "it is only when my heart swells almost to bursting, that I retire to give it vent; and as you know grief is ever eloquent, I have been endeavouring to arrange my thoughts to deplore, in poetical language, my dear
M 4 parent's

parent's sufferings; but as yet my efforts have not been successful."

"Then," said he, "why not resign all attempts to climb the toilsome ascent, whose summit has been gained by so few, and employ your talents in that more useful occupation, when they cannot fail of success, I mean that of attending the sick room of your unhappy mother? Depend on it, if fame is your object, you will acquire more by discharging the duty of this affectionate office, than by a thousand even successful invocations to the muses: and ask your conscience whether the conviction of having soothed one pang of her anguish, will not, when she can no longer feel them, afford you more real satisfaction than the most poetical lamentation that was ever composed?"

Harriet sighed, without assenting; she wished to assist her mother; but for the dear hope of becoming a poetess, no earthly compensation could be made; she, however, promised, in future, never to leave her

her mother, unless she slept : and Mr. Mallett, but half satisfied, took his leave.

Helen, whose spirits now became tranquillized, and who readily acceded to the wishes of her friends, consented to Mrs. Clemments's proposal, to accompany her to T——. The future residence of the sisters was to be the same ; and Alvondown, or its neighbourhood, was the favourite spot in which Helen wished to spend the remainder of her days ; but no house for the present offered.

Mrs. Clemments and Emily used every endeavour to raise the drooping spirits of their companion, as they travelled from Alvondown. As the journey was too long to be undertaken in a day, they deviated from the direct road, to pass the night at the inn whither Lady Elvira Musgrove first conducted Helen, when she accompanied her to Bath.

It was now November, and the day was nearly closed when they reached the place of destination. They were scarcely accom-

modated with the only decent sitting-room the house afforded, when another chaise stopped at the door, and the landlady bustled out to pay her respects to the company it contained.

In a few minutes she entered the parlour, and, after a thousand apologies for the intrusion, begged to know if the ladies would have the goodness to admit a stranger, who was just arrived?—she lamented that her house contained but one sitting-room fit for gentlefolks, but it never had so happened that two carriages met there before; however, as this was now the case, she hoped the ladies would make no objection to the addition of a fellow-traveller.

To Helen, the idea of a stranger's society was by no means desirable; but it was, under the present circumstances, impossible to object to such a proposal; and in a few minutes the door opened, and Lady Elvira Musgrove made her appearance.

Could Helen have divined who the stranger

stranger was, she certainly would have avoided the interview—but now there was no time for hesitation.

Lady Elvira immediately recognised her, and affectionately embracing her, she exclaimed—"My dearest Helen, how fortunate—how unexpected is this interview!—Can I hope you will ever forgive me?"

Helen returned her embrace, but she could not speak; her mourning habit bespoke her situation, which Lady Elvira had not before heard.

After their emotions had, in some degree, subsided, Lady Elvira renewed her apologies. "I deserve not your lenity, my injured friend," said she; "and if you now reject my overtures of renewed friendship, I dare not arraign the justice of your decision. But, Helen, if you knew how long, how anxiously my heart has ached to throw itself on your mercy, you would, at least, compassionate the weakness that led it astray."

"Oh, Lady Elvira," interrupted Helen,

M 6

"I cannot

"I cannot bear to hear you talk in this strain; believe me, I never felt resentful: you were deceived—and under such circumstances, how could you act differently? —To be thus restored to your favour, affords me more sincere pleasure than I can possibly express."

"Long since should I have sued for a reconciliation," said Lady Elvira, "had I not known how comfortably you were settled; and had I not feared that you would consider my concessions as made to those more liberal friends who discovered and estimated your worth. How very severely they must have censured my conduct towards you, I was sufficiently aware; and so strongly has the dread of this opinion operated on my mind, that had not accident assisted my wishes, they never would have been realized."

Helen requested that the subject might be dropped, and that they might both forget this interruption to their friendship.

Mrs. Clemments was introduced; and the

evening passed with real satisfaction to all. From Mrs. Clemments, Lady Elvira received an account of the circumstances respecting Courtenay, with which she was unacquainted, after Helen had retired for the night.

“How could I,” thought she, “suspect her sincere heart of inconstancy?—and how can I ever make peace with my own conscience, for adding one pang to her afflictions?”

The subject became so very painful to her feelings, that Mrs. Clemments, who perceived how deeply she was affected, dropped it: and full of sad reflections, Lady Elvira retired to her apartment. She passed the night without much sleep; and at an early hour the following morning, knocked at Helen’s door.

The latter, who was always an early riser, was up, and she immediately admitted her visitor.

“Forgive this early intrusion, my dear Helen,” said she, after enquiring affectionately

ately how she rested ; “ but a scheme, that has occupied my mind the whole night, I so anxiously wished to consult you on, that my impatience could be no longer restrained. Perhaps you guess it—and perhaps the proposal is merely selfish ; you shall, however, decide. You well know, my dear, what a source of pleasure your society always proved to me, from the moment I first enjoyed it, to that ill-fated day when I suffered ~~a~~ affection for the most deceitful and worthless of his sex, to interrupt its continuance. My conscience has, however, so severely chastised me for the offence, that I trust you will receive my contrition, and again restore me to your affection ; and if I have so far succeeded, Helen, may I hope that we may return to our former terms of friendship, and that one residence may again contain us?—You know not the pleasure that such an arrangement would afford me, and we are now so situated, that jealousy——(oh how I blush to acknowledge that so odious a passion

passion could ever contaminate my heart! I can throw no obstacles between us."

"I feel truly grateful for your wish to reside with me," Helen replied; "and to enjoy the society of so beloved a friend, would certainly constitute my greatest felicity: but when I recollect the difference of our situations, I fear I must deny myself so pleasing an indulgence. My prospects in this world are joyless; nor can I find consolation from the pursuits that are usually sought as the soothers of affliction. I trust my ideas are not culpably romantic or unsocial, but indeed I can never again mix with the world. From my earliest infancy have my days been spent in retirement; I loved it in my happiest moments, and now, with my mind enervated by misfortune, it would be doubly irksome to emerge from the seclusion that has ever been so congenial to my feelings. And for you, Lady Elvira, the wish to deprive you of those cheering comforts which society afford, would be a sacrifice too great
for

for friendship to sanction ; I must therefore, though reluctantly, refuse the enjoyment you so generously offer me."

Lady Elvira hesitated a few moments, and then said—"Helen, be candid with me; I do not, for a moment, doubt the affection you profess for me—but tell me truly, whether the society of even your most beloved friends will not be sometimes irksome to you?"

"Without hesitation I can answer, that yours would be a treasure of whose value I should ever be sensible. I will not say but that there may be moments, nay hours, in every day, when I shall court entire solitude; but this indulgence you would grant me, without imputing it to a decrease of affection."

"Then, my dear friend, every other obstacle vanishes; your residence shall be mine. Bath, the place of my nativity, and almost constant residence since, is the last place on earth to which it is possible to feel a romantic attachment: you, Helen,
have

have very different sentiments on the subject; your native village is, I well know, the spot in which you will fix your abode, and to that favourite residence, if you make no objection, I will accompany you. We will so arrange our apartments, and the disposition of our time, so that choice, and not necessity, shall obtrude us on each other. I shall sometimes receive my visitors, but you shall never be surprised by their unexpected entrance; nor will I ever solicit you to join any society from which you wish to be excluded. I may, at times, feel disposed to return to the circle I now propose quitting; but if I should, it will be no interruption to the uniformity of your plan; you will suffer me to indulge my wayward fancies, and only pity the vacant mind that cannot find resources without the assistance of external objects to furnish them. What say you?—does this *prettily sketched* plan in the ærial regions of the imagination, promise to stand equally permanent

permanent on the more solid foundation of good sense?"

"Certainly, as far as my knowledge of architecture reaches," replied Helen, with a smile; "but what say you to the addition of my sister and niece?—They have promised to be of my household, and will leave their own habitation, to favour the unconquerable partiality for Alvondown that you so justly ascribe to me."

"I can object to no society that is pleasing to my dear Helen," said Lady Elvira; "and this dear girl——" Emily now entered to say breakfast waited, "if her countenance is the index of her mind, promises to add greatly to the comfort of our domestic circle."

"Indeed, you have not formed a wrong opinion of my Emily, if you have read a good disposition and an affectionate heart in her countenance," said Helen; "for I will venture to assure you, these characters are not deceitful; her other qualities I shall

shall leave to your penetration to discover."

"Oh, my dear aunt," said Emily, whose cheeks were immediately tinged with the deepest vermillion dye, "you are too partial to your little girl; but if I do possess any one good quality, I am indebted to you and my dear mamma for it."

"I shall not rely on your aunt's opinion, my dear," said Lady Elvira, with a smile, as she took Emily's hand, and proceeded down stairs; "if therefore our sentiments happen to coincide, pray impute the circumstance to my own discernment, and not to the impression she has given me of you."

Lady Elvira's plan was now proposed to Mrs. Clemments, who, since it was the first wish of her heart to bestow comfort on her afflicted sister, wanted no entreaties to accede to any plan which met with her approbation.

But the difficulty of procuring a house was now to be solved: no habitation offered in the neighbourhood of Alvondown,

down, sufficiently large for their accommodation ; a small estate was, however, to be sold, which lay about a mile from the village. A farm-house stood on the premises ; and it was agreed that some enquiries respecting it should be made ; and if it should be thought eligible, Helen proposed purchasing it : and as she had so decidedly fixed on its being her continued residence, and was so thoroughly convinced that no inducement would alter this determination, she particularly wished to call the residence her own, which proposal was readily acceded to ; and Lady Elvira determined to go immediately to Alvondown, to consult Mr. Mallett respecting the purchase.

She was then returning from a watering-place to Bath, but as she had no particular object to draw her thither, she altered the plan of her route, and prepared to journey again to the sea-coast, while Helen and her friends pursued the road to T——.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

~~“Grieve not like those~~

Who have no hope; ye yet shall meet again;

We still are in a kind Creator's hand;

External goodness reigns.”

THOMSON.

A CROWD of melancholy reflections disturbed Helen's mind when she re-entered her sister's habitation, and was conducted to the parlour in which she received Courtenay, when he came to tell her that the obstacles to their union were removed.

“Oh,” thought she, “how short lived was the felicity that we then anticipated! —yet are my regrets selfish, and I am highly

highly culpable in thus suffering them to cling to my heart !”

A letter from Maria Elton, a few days after her arrival, afforded her the truest satisfaction.

“ My Helen,” wrote she, “ whose feelings are never so selfish as to exclude the warm interest she takes in the welfare and happiness of her friends, will, I am assured, rejoice that a bright gleam of comfort has at last dispelled the heavy clouds of despair, which so long obscured my native cheerfulness. You will be astonished, Helen ; but you cannot experience half the consternation that overpowered my mind, when the unexpected declaration accosted my ear ; yes, my friend, Lifford is, in reality, my lover. On the evening that you quitted Lemonbrook, you know he was my companion ; after your departure he requested me to walk, and

and I assented. The evening was unusually clear—not a murmur invaded nature's soft tranquillity. We entered the bower, where he had seen you a short time before; you were the subject of our conversation, and I believe you will readily guess in what terms we spoke of you; for though my heart confessed you were my rival, that conviction did not so far contract it as to cherish the growth of envy. We talked of you with enthusiasm; the subject was peculiarly interesting to Lifford, and seemed a seasonable relief to his sorrow. He at length expressed his apprehensions that he tired me (for his affection was too honest to seek concealment) with the repetition of his disappointment. You will do me the justice to believe, Helen, that my favourable sentiments for him were not so selfish as to exclude sympathy for his sufferings. Indeed, to afford him consolation was a flattering conviction, the pleasure of which I could ill conceal. My zeal interested him, and he continued to seek my society;

society : I was, however, aware of the inducement, and endeavoured to steel all the avenues to my heart : how far I succeeded, you will perhaps guess—but let the event decide. After frequent repetitions of these interesting conversations, he felt a warmer sentiment of friendship for me than during our former intercourse.—But as prolixity on this subject, though interesting to the persons concerned, is wearisome and sickening to others, I shall wave minute particulars, and simply declare, that he is now every thing my most romantic wishes could have formed him. To you, Helen, am I indebted for the happiness I enjoy ; for he never would have discovered my partiality, had he not sought my society for the dear pleasure of praising you. My tell-tale heart, I believe, by degrees disclosed a secret to him which he could not misunderstand. He tells me that you have, more than once, hinted at the possibility of his inspiring some worthy heart with a mutual passion ; but he did not understand you,

you, nor did he wish for an explanation, for without those favourable sentiments in his own, how could they be reciprocated?—I suppose I have acted with great weakness; and you, Helen, would have possessed sufficient resolution to have concealed for ever so apparently ill-fated a passion; but I profess myself no stoic, and therefore cannot lament the weakness that has made me so very—very happy. Tell me when I shall visit you, my dearest friend; the moment you wish for my presence, I will fly to you; you know not how ardently I wish for your society; and my mother would be happy indeed, could I prevail on you to join our circle; but your own feelings must direct you. Adieu, then, my beloved friend. Believe me with sincerity,

“Your truly affectionate

“ MARIA ELTON.”

Helen truly participated in her friend's happiness, though the unexpected intelligence brought to her recollection scenes too painfully interesting. She felt it impossible yet to accept Maria's invitation to visit Lemonbrook; a thousand circumstances would there too cruelly remind her of the friend she had lost, for she was aware that innumerable objects, amidst the sylvan scenes of rural retirement, rest on the heart, and while they soften its feelings, render it more sensitive to the impression of sorrow. This she had already sufficiently experienced at Alvondown; but there no distance of time had thrown that high degree of recollective agony on her mind, which her present situation would certainly excite at Lemonbrook.

Her sensibilities were not so powerfully awakened at T——; the vapid insipidity of a country town, in whose streets the same artificial faces, though continually seen, could create no interest, had left no other impression than that general one
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ever present to her mind, that Courtenay was no more. Her spirits had long felt that habitual depression which no external object could overcome; it was, however, the softened sorrow of a corrected mind: and though her countenance evinced to every beholder, that she had drank deeply of the bitter waters of affliction, it was sufficiently apparent that the turbulence of passionate grief had never distracted her heart; and the sympathy which this expression excited in the breast of every beholder, was so blended with admiration and respect, that no language can fully declare the sentiment. Never, indeed, since Courtenay's death, had a day passed but she spent some part of it in solitude and tears; but those moments were become moments of luxury, rather than of suffering. In idea, she conversed with her departed friend, such as she had known him in the bloom of health, and such as, she hoped, she should again behold him, when the mortal veil that now separated them was

withdrawn ; her fervid imagination even ventured to penetrate that awful veil ; she formed *visions*, such as her finite comprehension could understand ; and fancied herself in the blissful regions of the blessed, most happy in the society of her departed parents and husband ; and after those mental wanderings, she always returned with renewed spirits to her sister and niece.

Emily possessed her sincerest affection ; an animated, well-informed, and warm-hearted girl of fifteen, sincerely attached to her aunt, and exerting every power she possessed to lessen the load of sorrow which, though she understood not from experience, her sensibility taught her to feel, she could not fail of creating a strong interest in the affectionate bosom of Helen.

Emily's understanding was acute, and she was sufficiently aware of her aunt's superiority, in point of abilities, to her mother ; but she had the address, or rather that genuine good nature, and high sense of filial duty,

duty, which taught her to conceal this discovery from her amiable and affectionate parent. If she wished to be guided by her aunt's advice, she always consulted her when her mother was absent, that no preference might be visible. In such a circle, it was impossible for time to become burthensome.

Helen had, now that her fortune was competent to her wishes, frequent opportunities of administering to the necessities of her fellow-creatures; and she had at T—— many pensioners, who blessed her with never-ceasing benedictions. Emily was always her companion, and frequently her almoner, which office afforded her real delight; she likewise frequently added her own little contributions, for her purse was liberally supplied by her mother.

Thus passed the winter, with the occurrence of but one event which could disturb Helen's reflections from the channel in which they now seemed so tranquilly to

flow, which was the death of Mr. Courtenay.

As soon as Percival had possessed himself of the property his relation left him, he settled on his father an handsome annuity for life ; the fame of which encrease to his fortune reached the ears of some of his old associates, six of whom now chose to pay him a congratulatory visit, and journeyed to Alvondown for that purpose.—For the first two or three hours after their arrival, he talked of his poor boy, and, in spite of ridicule, dropped a few tears to his memory ; but Mr. Courtenay answered the text—“ It is better to go the house of mourning than to the house of feasting,” in Sterne’s own words—“ That I deny.”

He did not, indeed, with Sterne, pursue the subject, and after picturing the pleasures and advantages to be derived from both, contradict his first assertion, but strictly adhered to the literal sense, as well in practice as theory. Soon, then, he was prevailed

prevailed on to throw entirely off the internal garb of mourning for his son, though he still externally wore the semblance of woe. But one week, however, passed in dissipation before he was seized with a putrid fever, during which he was, at intervals, sufficiently sensible of his danger, and the profligacy that was so rapidly sealing his doom, to experience agonies too shocking to describe. A short period now terminated his existence; and in quitting the world, he left an awful and deeply-impressive lesson to his depraved companions.

Helen could feel neither affection nor respect for Mr. Courtenay, but she dropped the tear of regret at the untimely fate of Percival's father.

It was extraordinary that Hartly had never yet claimed the sum which was, in his wife's behalf, his due, from old Courtenay. Percival had appropriated five thousand pounds for the purpose of payment, as soon as he became possessed of his fortune; but neither Hartly nor his wife had

been visible since the rencontre at T——, and what part of the world he now inhabited, Helen remained totally ignorant of.

The spring now advanced; and nature again clothed the inanimate creation in its cheerful light green robe. Helen loved the season; and after the long confinement which the bleak winds and watery atmosphere of winter had occasioned, she embraced the earliest opportunity to renew her rural excursions.

Lady Elvira, who had visited T—— on her return from Alvondown, had then announced the favourable result of their treaty, respecting the purchase of the estate in that neighbourhood. The terms had been finally agreed on, and an architect employed, who had engaged to render the edifice habitable by the ensuing summer. Lady Elvira and Helen had, therefore, determined on going to Alvondown early in the spring, and spending the intermediate time in a lodging; and a letter from
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the former now reminded Helen that it was time to put this plan in execution.

Helen had nothing to detain her at T——, and she assented to Lady Elvira's proposal to proceed to that place immediately.

Mrs. Clemments had much to settle and arrange, before she could finally leave her old residence ; she and Emily were, therefore, left to spend the summer at T——.

Helen's presence was ever productive of sincere pleasure to Mr. Mallett ; and the good man, on her arrival, expressed some part of the satisfaction he felt at the assurance of her fixing her residence so near him.

The workmen were now busily employed on the house, which was in a great state of forwardness, and promised to be speedily and elegantly compleated. Two circum-jacent fields were converted into pleasure-grounds ; in the disposition of which, Lady Elvira and Helen fully displayed their taste.

Mrs. Ashton's miserable existence was not yet terminated, and she now anxiously wished to receive the forgiveness of Helen, who readily complied with Mrs. Burnby's request to visit her mother. The first interview was, to the latter, painful in the extreme; the gentleness of Helen's manners, however, in some degree softened the acuteness of self-condemnation, and her presence soon became the greatest relief that the wretched invalid could experience.

Harriet paid her mother all the attention that her cold feelings thought requisite; they, however, dictated no laborious task. She appropriated certain hours, indeed, to the performance of her duty; but an equal portion of time was spent in fruitless solicitations to the inexorable muses, when, though her mother languished for assistance, it was vain to solicit it. Harriet possessed much of the cant of sensibility, but she understood not even the common feelings of humanity; those feelings had, indeed, lived transiently in her heart,

heart, when accidentally excited—but exertion soon destroyed them; and she had now been accustomed to her mother's sufferings sufficiently long to lose all sympathy for their acuteness, and she could with the most perfect apathy listen to her agonizing complaints.

Helen, who soon perceived this negligence, notwithstanding her endeavours to conceal it, frequently expostulated on the cruelty of her conduct, and as frequently did Harriet promise amendment, with momentary sincerity; but a bright thought, in embryo, for never had she brought one to perfection, was sure to engross every idea; and every thing but the attempt to adorn it with poetical language was forgotten; the household affairs were, consequently, neglected, for the whole management of the domestic department was deputed to a dirty infirm old woman; and so disgusting was the appearance of the house and its inhabitants, that nothing but compassion for the suf-

ferer could have induced Helen to enter it.

Helen had made every enquiry she could think of, to discover the residence of Mrs. Hartly, though without success; she was no where to be found; and Helen had almost given up the expectation of ever having an opportunity of restoring to her the portion of her fortune appropriated to Mr. Courtenay's use, when Maria Elton accidentally discovered her in London.— She met her in the street, so wretchedly attired, that had she not recognised her features at the first glance, curiosity would not have induced her to bestow a second. Maria immediately addressed her, and though she evidently wished to elude observation, since it was now impossible, she accepted Miss Elton's invitation to accompany her to their lodgings. Maria soon informed her for what purpose she so anxiously wished to speak with her; at which intelligence Sophia burst into tears.

“ Oh,” she exclaimed, “ Mrs. Courtenay

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is too good to such a wretch as I am !—My husband, miserable creature as I am to have given him such an appellation ! has squandered all my fortune at the gaming-table ; nothing remains, and he is now drinking deeply of the bitter cup of remorse, in a garret, whither we have been obliged to betake ourselves. What will become of us, Heaven only knows : he consulted a counsellor respecting the sum expended by old Mr. Courtenay, and found, that as he died without effects, and his son was likewise dead, nothing could be recovered. Oh, Miss Elton, how can I appear in your presence !—I, who insulted the poor Harriet, my professed bosom friend, in the season of (I then thought) inexhaustible prosperity !—What a just reproof did your mother then bestow on me !—indeed I am too conscious how little I deserve to be rescued from the wretched fate that now threatens me.”

Maria was deeply affected at her contrition, and slipping her purse into her
hand,

hand, she promised to write immediately to Mrs. Courtenay an account of her situation.

Sophia's pride revolted at the idea of declaring her poverty, but the hope of relief was a powerful incentive, and she yielded to its impulse.

Maria delayed not to fulfil her engagement, and Helen as readily acted her part, in restoring the money so justly Mrs. Hartly's due. She consulted Mr. Mallett, who thought that as it might now be considered more a donation than a debt, it ought to be secured to Sophia, so that her husband might have no claim on it, more than she chose to bestow on him; for, however sincere might be his present contrition, it was too probable that again possessed of the means, his inherent propensity for dissipation might be strengthened. Settlements were accordingly made, which put Mrs. Hartly in possession of five thousand pounds, over which her husband could have no power.

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She received this donation with exclamations of the warmest gratitude and self-condemnation ; and Maria Elton, by whose means she was thus rescued from poverty and wretchedness, believed that her future life would atone for her past errors. Unfortunately for the poor Sophia, her prediction was not verified.

Hartly, too deeply skilled in the talent of dissimulation for his imbecile wife to discover his artifices, now treated her with the most attentive tenderness ; and far from divining his hidden motives, Sophia believed him sincere, and anticipated all the enjoyment which the possession of five thousand pounds, and her husband's dependence on her generosity, could afford her—but these day-dreams were of short continuance. Determined to command the disposal of the money his wife now possessed, he invented a tale to deceive her, which completely answered his purpose : he told her that an offer to become partner in a principal banking-house had
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been made him ; that the five thousand pounds was the exact sum requisite for the purpose ; that their fortune would be made ; and that they should in future live in affluence.

Sophia, totally ignorant of every mercantile business, thought not a moment of the improbability of such a plan ; she enjoyed, therefore, the flattering prospect of again joining the gay circles, from which poverty had lately excluded her. What ornaments of dress would be most likely to excite the envy of those belles who had discovered and insulted her present penury, began to occupy much of her attention ; and she had visited all the milliners and dress-makers of notoriety at the west end of the town, when a different scene recalled her ideas from the contemplation of promised happiness to the conviction of real misery.

Hartly, who, though he meant not to dissipate the fortune so unexpectedly bestowed on him, no sooner found himself
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in undisputed possession of it, than that propensity for play, which necessity had for some time obscured, again broke out; he accordingly sought his old associates, who, having heard of his recent acquisition of fortune, received him with acclamations of pleasure. He again joined their circle, and frequented the most celebrated gaming-houses, where (after various successes) at the end of three months he found himself stripped of all that fortune which his artifices had so unjustly obtained.

The remorse which this sudden transition (occasioned by his own imprudence) excited, stung him to the soul; and as a temporary mitigation of his anguish, he had recourse to wine: the whole week he continued in a state of intoxication, and at last rambled to the habitation of his wife, from which he had absented himself, since fortune had proved so desperate an enemy.

This fatal intelligence had not been long in travelling to the ears of Sophia, who, possessing neither feeling nor discretion,
poured

poured a torrent of abuse on her wretched husband the moment he appeared.

Ill prepared for such an attack, he had still command enough over himself to sustain it for some time in silence ; continued aggravation, however, at length, together with the fumes of liquor that still filled his head, entirely subdued his patience, and he struck her such a violent blow as threw her on the floor. Her head fell against the sharp foot of a book-case, and occasioned a contusion which rendered her insensible. Her motionless appearance, and the stream of blood that issued from the wound in her head, convinced him that he had effectually silenced her.

A dread of the consequences instantly recalled his wandering senses, and he flew to his wife's cabinet, which he knew contained a bank bill of one hundred pounds, the only remaining portion of her five thousand, hastened to Falmouth, and immediately bespoke a passage in a packet bound to America.

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Some time elapsed before the unhappy Sophia recovered her senses; the efforts of her servant, however, who accidentally discovered her, at length restored to her the recollection of her wretchedness. A surgeon was sent for, who pronounced the skull fractured: his attention and skill, however, succeeded in healing the wound; though in her present circumstances, she would have considered death a blessing. Not a single shilling of her fortune remained; and had not the surgeon proved a humane man, and assisted her, she must have perished for want of common necessities. As soon as she became a convalescent, he however declined his visits; he had contributed to her necessities while she was incapable of supporting herself by industry; and now that he had restored to her that first of earthly blessings, health, he no longer considered her an object of charity.

Thus deprived of the means of subsistence, and without the consolation of possessing

sessing one friend in creation, who, with affection, would sympathize in her distress, and reluctant, both from pride, and the consciousness of former ill conduct, to apply again either to Helen or her friends for assistance, she found herself destitute of every resource. In this forlorn condition, she was solicited to add one more to that miserable number of females who eat the bread of infamy; for some time she resisted the importunities of vice—distress, however, at length drove her on her fate, and she ended her days in disgrace and wretchedness.

The dwelling that was to receive Helen and her friends, in the neighbourhood of Alvondown, was soon compleated; the pleasure-grounds were laid out and cultivated, and in the month of August, Lady Elvira Musgrove, Mrs. Clemments, with her daughter and Helen, became inhabitants of their new abode. Old Agnes was appointed housekeeper, who declared that the very thoughts of living again with her two dear
young

young ladies had made her at least twenty years younger—it was more pleasure than she could ever have expected to enjoy in this world. Miss Emily, too, was a sweet-tempered young lady, exactly like her aunt Helen when she was her age.

To the whole circle, Lady Elvira Musgrove's society proved the greatest acquisition; the vivacity of her mind, corrected by good sense, and softened by sensibility, was a pleasing contrast to the melancholy that evinced itself in the manners of Helen: to the latter, the cheerfulness of her friend was never obtrusive, for Lady Elvira possessed the happy knack of adopting her conversation to the feelings of her friends. Without simulation or dissimulation did she possess the art of rendering herself agreeable to all with whom she associated. Her seclusion from the world at the early age of thirty, was a sacrifice which, probably, had not her heart deceived her in bestowing its best affections on an unworthy

worthy object, she would scarcely have made; but warm in her attachments to a degree of enthusiasm, the conflict she suffered on discovering the depravity of this highly-favoured object, was severe in the extreme. The greatest exertion of fortitude was requisite to support the misery it occasioned; by perseverance she, however, succeeded: and in this instance, though her mind consisted not of those heterogeneous principles which produce opposite extremes, and furnish the opinion so commonly received—that the soil which nourishes friendship into the greatest redundancy, will, should that friendship be once destroyed, produce a degree of malignity of proportionate violence, encouraged a species of resentment against the whole sex, which rendered her heart invulnerable to every subsequent lover.

It was not, however, her intention to seclude herself entirely from the world; she proposed at times to emerge from obscurity;

curity ; and she anticipated great pleasure from the prospect of introducing Emily, and rendering her a partaker in those scenes that had, when she was the age of her young friend, afforded her pleasure ; but she had chosen Alvondown for her home, and she looked to the tranquil circle with whom she here resided, for all her happiness.

Mrs. Ashton lingered long in a state of wretchedness ; and when, at length, her mortal sufferings terminated, the remorse which gnawed the heart of her daughter, for the inattention which conscience whispered she had shewn her unhappy parent, preyed on her constitution ; and after two years spent in misery, she expired, truly penitent for those errors, which had proceeded more from imbecility, and a wrong education, than real depravity.

But a short time elapsed before Maria Elton became the happy bride of her adored Lifford : fully sensible of her value,

value, he acknowledged the error of his former opinion, and confessed that it was possible to love a second time with warmth and sincerity.

As soon as the hymeneal vows were sealed, they paid a visit to their friends at Alvondown. Lifford beheld Helen with respect and the tenderest friendship; but he now understood too fully the value of reciprocal affection, to run any risk of a relapse.

Thus blessed with the society of those she loved best on earth, Helen, if not happy, was far from miserable; perhaps the tranquillity of her mind, bestowed, even after all the deep wounds that had afflicted it, as large a portion of peace as generally falls to the lot of mortals. The never-ceasing pleasure of relieving the distressed became the chief business of her life; she was adored as the universal friend and comforter of affliction: nor were the donations of her purse the only benefits she conferred

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on her poor neighbours—the affability of her manners, and the sincerity of her compassion, possessed charms which the mere distributors of pecuniary gifts cannot understand.

Mr. Mallett was still her counsellor and friend ; from her intercourse with him was her greatest source of consolation derived ; nor was her attentive tenderness, which seemed to him that of a daughter, of less importance to him.

Thus, then, though worth may sometimes fail of receiving the reward which finite judgment would bestow, we shall find it ever rising triumphant over vice. Thus Helen, though severely chastened in misfortune's rugged school, felt all that calm serenity which an unspotted conscience could alone bestow; while her enemies, whose malice invented plans, apparently successful, to blast her bright prospects, were themselves the victims.

Does it not, then, appear that peace of
VOL. II. o conscience

conscience is the sole invaluable blessing that can render our journey from the cradle to the grave happy, and ensure us that passage to eternity, which will crown our hopes with everlasting bliss?

FINIS.



Lane, Darling, and Co. Leadenhall-Street.





